

The impact of 1956 on the Left in Western Europe.

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Introduction.

It is an honour and a privilege to be asked to contribute to this conference on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. If I may be permitted to start with a brief personal recollection, the events of that year in Hungary are one of my earliest political memories, though I was only 8 years old at the time. My parents subscribed to a British liberally-inclined newspaper, 'The News Chronicle' (a paper which no longer exists), and I remember to this day reading in that paper a sentence which read something like this: 'The Hungarian people have drunk from the cup of liberty only to have it dashed from their lips'. I suppose that must have been written after the second Soviet invasion of 4 November.

Probably it is not a good idea to start a talk by criticising, or even closely analysing, the title of one's own talk, especially if one has chosen that title oneself, but let me make a couple of remarks about the subject, 'the impact of 1956 on the Left in Western Europe'. How can one really assess the impact of a particular event, or series of events like those of 1956 in Hungary? I am reminded of Chou En-Lai's reply to the question posed to him, I believe some time in the 1960s, when he was asked about the consequences or impact of the French Revolution of 1789, and he replied 'It is too early to tell'. I think that was a wise remark, because historical events take a very long time for their full consequences and implications to work themselves out, and sometimes it is only with the benefit of hindsight and a long time perspective that one can see what some of those consequences were. There is also the danger of the 'post hoc, ergo propter hoc' error: because some event or process occurred *after* the Hungarian revolution of 1956, that does not necessarily mean that it happened *because of* the Hungarian uprising of 1956.

Taken as a whole, the year 1956 has been seen as a turning point in the history of post-war Europe. A recent historical work is called '1956, The World in Revolt', and has four parts each one dedicated to a season, so Part I is 'Winter: cracks in the old order', Part II is 'Spring: a yearning for freedom', Part III is called 'Summer, a spirit of rebellion', while Part IV, which contains a chapter dedicated to the Hungarian revolution is called 'Autumn: Revolution and Reaction' (Simon Hall, *1956, The World in Revolt*, London: Faber & Faber, 2016). The world was indeed in revolt in that year, as the book tells us, with chapters on the civil rights movement in the USA, Khrushchev's Secret Speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February, the savage fight for Algerian independence, and later that year the events in Hungary, the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, and the invasion by French and British forces of the Suez canal. One contributor to a symposium called '1956 and all that' (presumably an ironic reference to the parody of a school textbook on British history called '1066 and all that') talks about 1956 as 'the tipping

point of the post-war world', and this author then says that 'if that year is the turning point of the post-war world, we can perhaps identify a precise fulcrum: October 30 1956' because, he says, 'on that date, the Soviet Union was debating whether to roll back the Hungarian uprising...while the old western powers, Britain and France, in a last imperial adventure, were on the verge of initiating their Suez intervention' Nigel Willmott, 'Looking back on Hungary 1956', in Keith Flett, ed., 1956 and all that, p. 9).

I would also say that the idea of 'the Left' as a unified bloc is not sustainable, and probably my title should read the impact of 1956 on the *Lefts*, on the different sections of left-wing parties in Europe, who reacted in different ways to the Hungarian revolution. So I will divide my talk into three sections, which look at the ways in which 1956 impacted on left-wing politics in diverse ways, according to which section of the Left one is talking about. Indeed I would say that one of the ways in which the Hungarian Revolution impacted on the Left was to deepen its divisions, to divide further what was never a unified bloc of movements and parties in the first instance. I propose therefore to look in turn at these three sections of the Left: first at what can be called the New Left, then at the Communist parties, at least two major parties, the French and Italian Communist parties, and finally if rather briefly at social-democratic parties, and try and assess what impact the Hungarian revolution had on those distinct sections of the Left. Indeed, my first point is that it was out of the events of 1956, notably the Hungarian Revolution, that the New Left was born, so let me start by some kind of definition of the New Left which I think was a product of that turbulent year, within which the Hungarian Revolution was one of the most important events.

The New Left.

The New Left, like the Left as a whole, is or was a diverse movement, but I would say that it could be defined as the search for a form of socialism that rejected both Communism, at least in its Stalinist form, and also was critical of orthodox social-democracy as being too bureaucratic and reformist. So the New Left was the search for a new form of politics, on the Left but rejecting the hitherto dominant organisational forms of left-wing politics. And I think that one can say, and I hope I am not making exaggerated claims for Britain here, that it was in Britain that the New Left had important and original protagonists, and was highly significant among intellectuals, but not only intellectuals. Certainly in Britain the intellectual movement of the New Left originated in members of the Communist Party, notably the historians Edward Thompson (E.P. Thompson) and John Saville, both of whom initially wanted to discuss the issues raised by the Soviet intervention in Hungary within their (i.e. the British) Communist Party. Those in charge of the British CP ordered these two dissidents, if one can call them that, though initially they wanted to discuss the issues within the party, to cease the publication of a journal which they had started, called *The Reasoner*. Even though Thompson and Saville did in fact stop publication of this journal after its third issue, in November 1956, they both left the Communist Party and became important voices

in what was to become the British New Left. This was never a political party, and I think I am right in saying it was more important as an intellectual forum rather than an organised political movement. The last issue (of *The New Reasoner*) appeared in 1960, and an editorial in its last issue (written by Thompson and Saville) stated that 'we sought to re-habilitate the rational, humane and libertarian strand within the Communist tradition', and they also wrote that 'We tend to see 'Marxism' less as a self-sufficient system, more as a major creative influence within a wider socialist tradition' (Widgery p. 90). Certainly these representatives of the British first New Left were inspired by the Hungarian revolution of 1956: a powerful article by Edward Thompson called 'Through the smoke of Budapest' was published in *The Reasoner* on 1 November 1956, and attacked the Stalinism of the so-called People's Democracies. Thompson wrote in this article that 'The theory of the all-powerful, centralised state is wrong', 'the attitude towards the role of the Party, and towards party comrades, is wrong', 'And the Stalinist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat is wrong'. Thompson attacked what he called 'mechanical idealism' and the 'moral atrophy' of Stalinist Marxism. But he made it clear that these were not just theoretical concerns, since, as he wrote 'The Polish and Hungarian people have written their critique of Stalinism upon their streets and squares'. These words were written before the second decisive intervention on 4 November of Soviet tanks into and against the Hungarian Revolution, so towards the end of the article it expressed the hope that 'the working people and students who shed their blood at Budapest' might 'regain mastery over their own future and curb the mob passions unloosed by their ordeal'.

Of course the New Left was much broader than this one intellectual, Edward Thompson, but he was an extremely important figure, not least because of his concept of 'socialist humanism'. This can I think be defined as an insistence on the importance of human agency and on the moral standards to be observed in any socialist movement. The concept of 'socialist humanism' was directed against a mechanical theory of history, which emphasised the determinism and inevitable unfolding of historical forces irrespective of human will and creative agency. So I think that this concept of human agency echoed some of the concerns of Marx's early writings, including the Paris Manuscripts of 1844. Thompson's own historical work emphasised this idea of history from below, the self-making of the English working class (to refer to his most famous book, *The Making of the English Working Class*). In his own political and intellectual career he was one of the founders of END, European Nuclear Disarmament, which sought to oppose the rivalry of the two blocs in the Cold War, and his writings argued against what he called 'exterminism', the danger of nuclear war stemming from the arms race between the two blocs. So I would say that part of the impact of 1956 lay in the evolution of a new form of socialism, or rather of a movement which sought alternatives to the logic of the Cold War, encapsulated in the slogan 'neither Washington nor Moscow'. To stick with Edward Thompson for the moment, his polemic against the type of Marxism represented by the French philosopher Louis Althusser stemmed from the same concern with 'socialism humanism', the fear that the 'structuralism' of Althusser's Marxism

left no room for creative human action and subordinated this to a mechanical kind of determinism. It is interesting that in some of his extended political essays, written long after 1956, Thompson repeatedly refers to 1956 as a decisive moment, and to his concept of 'socialist humanism', in opposition to intellectual perspectives (whether of the Nairn/Anderson kind, or the Althusser kind) that suppress or deny the idea of human agency in the name of determinist or structuralist forces. His long critique of Althusser concluded by stating that 'The choice which faces the Marxist tradition today, and which has long faced it, is that between idealist irrationalism and the operative and active reason' and Thompson acknowledged that he repeatedly saw the year 1956 as a key point of reference for his work.

So for him 1956, and in particular the Hungarian uprising, stood for an active and humanistic form of Marxism, opposed to Stalinist orthodoxy, and I think this was true of the wider New Left, which represented a distinct strand of socialism which erupted again in 1968, in the May Events in Paris and in response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of that year. It was a form of socialist politics that drew inspiration from the workers' councils and student activism that had been such an important aspect of the uprising in Budapest. At the risk of generalising too wildly, I would say that this New Left appealed more to intellectuals and students than to workers who remained for the most part as members (in Britain) of the Labour Party or (in Western Europe) members of the mass Communist Parties of France and Italy. This New Left drew inspiration from the Hungarian Revolution, and indeed from the earlier Polish uprising in Poznan in June of that year. So here we have a form of socialism that rejected the premises of the Cold War and the division of Europe into the two blocs of liberal-democracy (the 'free world') and Communism. It found expression in the peace movement and in movements (in Britain) like CND and END (European Nuclear Disarmament). These movements wanted to break out of the rigid straitjacket imposed by Cold War politics, and were inclined towards a more libertarian form of socialism, rather than the structured processes of party politics whether through social-democratic or Communist parties organised on the lines of democratic-centralism.

Did this current of the New Left change the parameters of Cold War politics? Probably that was not the case, but it represented a new element in politics not just in the West. I think it offered a challenge to Communist regimes in the East, at least potentially. I suppose the main impact of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 was that for many, if not most, young radicals in Western Europe the so-called People's Democracies no longer represented an attractive or acceptable model of socialism. In that sense the events of 1956 signified the beginning of a long process which culminated in the collapse of Communism in 1989 and after. Soviet-type systems, marked by the 'leading role of the party' were no longer seen as inspirational, or as a model to be followed, but as bureaucratic party-dominated systems which repressed the workers and jealously hollowed out the space which an independent civil society should have occupied. Adherents of the New Left were inspired not by Soviet-

type systems but rather by the councils and 'democracy from below' which was such an important aspect of the Hungarian uprising, as demonstrated in the study by Bill Lomax of Hungary in 1956.

Communism.

If one of the consequences of the Hungarian uprising was to contribute to the birth of the New Left (though this is probably putting it too strongly- maybe it is better to say that the Hungarian revolution was one of the sparks which kindled the birth of the New Left in Britain and beyond), what was the impact on Communism outside the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies? Here I am concerned above all with the mass parties of Italy and France, which had a real presence in their respective societies. As I understand it, their official ideology committed them to see the USSR as the homeland of socialism, the model for a socialist society, and they were committed to follow the line decided on in Moscow, though with a degree of local autonomy. In organisational terms these mass Communist parties were organised on lines of democratic centralism, which as the old observation has it was much more centralist than democratic. They saw their task as to build up support for an alternative society, waiting for the day when this alternative society could be realised in practice. Hence the French historian Annie Kriegel's description of the PCF (the French Communist Party) as a 'counter-society', established within the framework of the wider liberal-democratic society, with its own organisations and mentality, rather like traditional German Social-Democracy before 1914. The PCF, and I think the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano, the Italian Communist Party) as well, sought to establish their presence in the wider society. In the case of the Italian party this was achieved through its control of certain municipalities and cities, like Bologna, where it gained considerable legitimacy and support by its efficient rule at a local level.

What then was the impact of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 on these mass parties? I would suggest *two* ways in which the Hungarian Revolution impacted on these parties. The *first* was that the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution led to the *exodus of many intellectuals from the parties*. Certainly, as we have seen, this was the case with the British party, though the CPGB was never remotely a mass presence in British politics compared with the role the PCF and the PCI played in their national political systems. A recent article on the PCI quotes the Italian Communist, Pietro Ingrao as saying that 1956 was an 'unforgettable' year (in an article written for the journal *Rinascita* in 1966). According to the article by Alessandro Iandolo (Contemporary European History 23/2, 2014) between 1956 and 1957 200,000 people left the PCI, and he says, perhaps surprisingly, that most of these were working-class members. The leadership of the PCI had, at least initially, supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary, though this decision was opposed by a group of intellectuals connected with the party who wrote a 'Manifesto of the 101'. Despite the fact that of those 200,000 people who left the party most were working-class members, Iandolo suggests that

most working-class members of the party supported the invasion of Hungary, and that in the PCI there was a split between the intellectuals, critical of the Soviet invasion, and the rank-and-file members who went along with the party line accepting the invasion. But as the article by Landolo points out, if the workers in the party did not disagree with the party line supporting the invasion, why then did many of them leave the party? Interestingly, the study by Landolo argues that 'The idea that the Soviet system could be wrong, and that the PCI needed to break free from it, was far from the minds of the working-class comrades in Milan. Even Stalin was still a hero'. Landolo quotes a resolution from a section of the PCI in Bologna stating that the comrades were 'happy to learn that the Revolutionary Government of Hungarian workers and peasants, led by Janos Kadar, backed by workers, Hungarian peasants and the Soviet army, has defeated the fascist counter-revolutionaries, ended the white terror...'

The reaction of the Italian Communist Party to the Hungarian Revolution is interesting, and quite complex. It seems it was not quite as simple as intellectuals against the Soviet intervention while the working-class membership supported it. The *leadership* of the party, under Palmiro Togliatti, supported the Soviet intervention, despite the criticism from the ranks of the intellectuals which was also shared, it seems, by many working-class party members. In the words of one account by an American historian (Blackmer p. 95), 'although less easily seen and recorded, the frustration and anger of the intellectuals was shared by many working-class members of the party, especially by relatively skilled workers with a higher degree of education. They felt the same sense of moral outrage at Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolution, the same sharp awareness of the shallowness of the official explanations, the same resentment against the PCI's inability to free itself from dependence on the Soviet Union'. And Blackmer adds 'Hungary was not the only cause of disillusionment, but for many it provided the necessary emotional stimulus for the psychologically painful step of breaking with the party.'

Thus, at least in Italy, but in France and Britain as well, the Hungarian Revolution deepened a split between intellectuals and working-class members, with the former, much more than the latter, critical of the Soviet invasion. Landolo suggests that it was more the difficulties of the PCI in responding to greater affluence of the workers and improved economic conditions, which meant that traditional Communist rhetoric and policy had less appeal, that led to workers leaving the party. It was the 'economic miracle' that led to the PCI modernising and adapting its policies, rather than a reaction to the invasion of Hungary in 1956. As Landolo suggests, the party had to modernise itself, 'This modernisation process eventually led to a diminished role for the Soviet Union. New members grew up in the midst of the economic 'boom', they had not participated in the resistance, and had no memory of Stalin'. The impact of 1956 was mainly on intellectual members of the party, and according to Landolo 'the party working-class rank and file were still attached to the idea of the USSR as the ideal society' (p. 281). The French Communist Party was rather different and more

'Stalinist' than the PCI. However, I would say that in both parties the events of Hungary in 1956 led to a disassociation between intellectuals and the mass Communist parties, and to the same phenomenon we noticed in our discussion of the New Left, the abandonment of the idea of Stalinist Soviet-type systems as the ideal to be striven for.

The *second* way in which 1956 impacted on the European Left is more indirect. I think there was a further important consequence of the Hungarian Revolution, in terms of its impact on the Communist Left, and that was the emergence of *Eurocommunism* in the 1970s. So the keyword here is really *Destalinisation*, the attempt by those (or at least some of those) who remained in the mass Communist parties to detach those parties from a blind allegiance to the Soviet Union and to the official ideology of those systems. I would suggest that many of the key concepts of what was later called Eurocommunism were proclaimed in the course of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In their book '*Hungary 1956 revisited, the message of a revolution, a quarter of a century after*', the Hungarian intellectuals Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller go so far as to say that Imre Nagy was the initiator and first martyr of Eurocommunism. How could such a claim be justified? The demands of the Hungarian revolutionaries, and it seems certainly those of Nagy himself, were for a democratic and pluralist form of socialism, with Hungary as a neutral country free of the Warsaw Pact but also not part of the Western bloc. The 1956 Revolution can be seen as an anti-totalitarian revolution, rejecting the idea of the monopoly of power by a single party, accepting ideas of pluralism and electoral competition to gain power, and thus rejecting the Stalinist interpretation of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as exercised by the one-and-only Communist party. The Hungarian Revolution also expressed the idea of a *national* road to socialism, and here I can quote from a speech given by Nagy on 28 October 1956 justifying the Hungarian Revolution as 'a great national and democratic movement, embracing and unifying all our people, developed with elementary force.' He claimed in that speech that in the course of the Hungarian Revolution there had been born a 'government of democratic national unity, independence and socialism'.

It seems to me that these ideas were central to the phenomenon which came to be called Eurocommunism, which only developed in the 1970s, i.e. many years after 1956. The basic idea of Eurocommunism was one of polycentrism, namely the idea that each individual country could develop its own national road to socialism, in other words rejecting the idea that the Bolshevik Revolution furnished the universal model of revolution. The Eurocommunist perspective was that in the circumstances of liberal-democracy, a different road to revolution was necessary, one which accepted electoral politics, the facts of political pluralism and civil liberties, in other words a national and democratic road to socialism in which the mass Communist parties of France, Italy and Spain would be the protagonists in their respective countries. No longer was the Soviet Union seen as the model of the desirable society, and the Bolshevik model of the party was rejected as being not appropriate for the societies of Western Europe. The same American historian from whom I

quoted earlier puts it well: 'it took the events of 1956 to force the party (that is the Italian Communist Party, PCI) to take seriously the need to define and pursue its own road. The Soviet model would not do: not only could it not be sold in Italy, as had been understood from the beginning, but it was now suddenly seen to be defective even in its own terms, and many the party now viewed it with deep scepticism' (Blackmer p. 98). Indeed one could say that the Italian party was or tried to be 'Eurocommunist' *avant la lettre*, since its attempts to define 'the Italian road to socialism' went well back before the 1970s and the years of Eurocommunism. Indeed ever since 1956 the Italian party had been trying, perhaps with limited success, to insist on the distinctiveness of its own path to socialism which would not take the route taken by the Bolsheviks in 1917.

I am not saying that the Hungarian revolution of 1956 *caused* Eurocommunism, or led to it in a direct sense. That would be far too simplistic, and I refer you back to my opening remarks about the difficulty of assessing the impact of any single historical event. The historian Bill Lomax, in his history of the Hungarian Revolution, describes Nagy's ideas as 'revisionist', and sums up this kind of revisionism as including this idea: 'the replacement of "proletarian internationalism", in the sense of mechanical conformism to the Soviet model, by the principle of different national roads to socialism'. That could equally well be a description of the core of Eurocommunism as adopted by the major Communist parties of Western Europe. So some of the ideas which inspired the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 resurfaced, let me put it like that, in the relatively short-lived phenomenon of Eurocommunism more than 20 years later. How to explain this coincidence, or was it a coincidence? I do not know if some of the architects of Eurocommunism explicitly referred to the events of Hungary in 1956. My suggestion is that after 1956, and then again after the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, the leaders of Western Communist parties realised that the Soviet model of Communism had been so discredited and had no longer any popular appeal, that it was necessary to develop a different strategy and model of Communism if their parties were to have any chance of survival in the context of Western liberal-democratic societies.

I would therefore argue that the events of 1956 in Hungary were crucial in unleashing or stimulating the process of deStalinisation in the Western Communist Parties. This process started with Khrushchev's Secret Speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, but the Hungarian Revolution gave further impetus to a process which was to lead to the phenomenon of Eurocommunism. This was an attempt by Western Communist Parties, notably the Italian party, to separate themselves from the Soviet model, and to seek to assert their independence and their national autonomy. One recent survey of international communism (*The Global Revolution, a history of international Communism*, by the Italian historian Silvio Pons) notes that 'a series of bilateral meetings between the PCI, the PCF, and the PCE in 1975 and 1976 gave rise to 'Eurocommunism'', and the same author argues that 'Rather than a movement with a specific programme, Eurocommunism was an alliance that

distanced itself from the Soviet model and acknowledged the value of Western democracy' (p. 286). Pons in his account comes to the conclusion that Eurocommunism did not succeed and that by the end of the 1970s it had run its course. He argues that 'As a political movement, Eurocommunism was a failure. Its main result was to bury international communism in Europe as well.' I suppose this indicates that deStalinisation in Western Communist parties had its limits. The French party remained on the whole a Stalinist party, whereas the Italian party had more success and went much further in its separation from the Soviet Union.

The conclusion is that the Hungarian revolution was an important stage in the process of reducing the appeal of the Soviet model of socialism in the West, and this inevitably undermined the appeal of the Communist Parties of Western Europe, even the Italian party which had gone furthest in distancing itself from what the Soviet Union continued to call 'the socialist camp'. Some of the ideas and aspirations expressed in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 resurfaced in the phenomenon of Eurocommunism, notably ideas of polycentrism, pluralism and the idea of a national road to socialism. But this was a rather indirect kind of influence, since I have not seen any evidence that linked the memory of Hungary in 1956 *directly* to the short-lived movement of Eurocommunism. Looking back with hindsight both to the memory of 1956 and to the mid-1970s years of Eurocommunism one can see similarities and common aspirations, in particular the acceptance of pluralism, democratic competition and the idea of a socialist or communist party as expressing *national* demands, and not being subordinated to a foreign directing centre, i.e. the Soviet Union. This was expressed as a rejection of the slogan of 'proletarian internationalism', which had come to mean in practice the control by the Soviet Union of communist parties everywhere, and the acceptance of one model of party organisation as the only valid one. The similarity between Eurocommunism and the ideas of the Hungarian Revolution is not necessarily evidence of a *direct* influence of the latter over the former.

Social-democracy

I said that the third part of my presentation would deal with the impact of the Hungarian uprising on social-democratic parties, and on this I have not so much to say. It seems to me that the main impact of the events in Hungary in 1956 was to intensify social-democratic hostility to communist regimes and to the ideas of what the East German dissident Rudolf Bahro called 'real existing socialism'. Bahro, in a book called 'The Alternative in Eastern Europe', which was quite influential at the time of its publication in the 1970s, insisted on the difference between the concept of socialism as developed in the classical writings of Marx and Engels, and the reality of Soviet-type systems as they had developed in Russia after 1917, and had been imposed on East European countries after the Second World War, and of course on East Germany, the so-called German Democratic Republic (DDR) as well, indeed most strongly of all.

The resonance of the Hungarian Revolution was a paradoxical one, in that it linked the idea of national independence and self-determination with *opposition* to communism, and perhaps by extension with opposition to socialism in general. I say paradoxical because the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 seems to me to have been an attempt to realise a form of socialism, as manifested by the workers' councils and the ideas of Imre Nagy. It was an attempt to combine socialism and democracy, which was ruthlessly crushed by the Soviet intervention. The impact of the Hungarian Revolution was certainly, as we have seen, to undermine the idea that Communism as a type of regime that could have any appeal in the West, and therefore this reduced the chances of success of Western Communist parties, unless they radically distanced themselves from the Soviet model, as the Italian party did- but even that did not save them from decline and their eventual self-liquidation.

If then Communism and the parties supporting it lost their appeal in Western Europe because (or at least partly because) of the Hungarian Revolution, then this was in some ways to the benefit of social-democratic parties which had always been vociferous in their anti-Communism and in their insistence on a democratic and gradualist perspective. I would say that the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution deepened the rift between West and East in the Cold War, and weakened the socialist ideal and its appeal. Parties like the British Labour Party became more Atlanticist in their orientation, more aligned to the USA, and more inclined to accept the premises of Cold War politics, the hard division between the two blocs of East and West. In turn the New Left, as we have seen, rejected both social-democracy as being too reformist, and Soviet-style Communism as being authoritarian and incompatible with the socialist ideals of the free ruling of society by the workers. So I would summarise the impact of 1956 in a paradoxical way: despite being, for the most part, an attempt to realise the ideal of a democratic and participatory socialism, the events of 1956 in Hungary certainly discredited the notion of the Soviet Union and Soviet communism as in any way socialist. 1956 gave plenty of ammunition to those who said that socialism in general could not be compatible with freedom. Reflection on Hungary in 1956 reinforced the idea of social democracy, a gradualist parliamentary socialism which would accept and defend democratic rights and liberties. In turn this was deemed inadequate by at least some members of the New Left who wanted a more activist and participatory form of socialism, as represented by movements rather than parties, and which rose up in the May events of 1968.

If this analysis is right, then the long-term impact of 1956 on the West European Left was to weaken the appeal of communist parties, strengthen the hold of Atlanticist-oriented social-democratic parties like the SPD in Germany, and at the same time give birth to a New Left which engaged critically with both social-democracy and orthodox communism. This New Left was a movement appealing more to young people, students and intellectuals, some of whom (like the afore-mentioned Thompson and Saville) were former members of the Communist Party.

Conclusion: the position today.

But if we extend the analysis to the present time, then the legacy of 1956 seems more complex or indeed diffuse and weak. Communism collapsed mainly (I think) because it was incompatible with democracy, as 1956 had revealed. After the collapse of Communism, the recovery of national independence by countries formerly under the Soviet domination had little to do with the socialist ideals of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 but more with the restoration of liberal-democracy and civil liberties, and indeed Western-style consumerism too. The New Left ideas of socialism from below (though that is simplifying things considerably) have resurfaced in movements of direct action like 'Occupy' and in the anti-globalisation movement, and it is doubtful if one can draw much of a link between those kind of movements (which are rather episodic and piecemeal, concerned more with particular issues rather than with an overall ideology) and the ideals of the Hungarian revolution of 1956. And as for more traditional social-democratic parties, in the present state of the world they seem shaken by the loss of their traditional social base in the form of a solidly organised working class, and threatened by the rise of populist parties.

I would therefore conclude that looking back on 1956 from the perspective of today and thinking about the impact of the Hungarian Revolution on parties, movements and ideologies of the Left, the main impact was one of the discrediting of the idea of the Soviet Union and Soviet-type Communism as an ideal and model of socialism. In turn this stimulated the emergence of a New Left, though its influence was more among students and intellectuals than among workers. Social-democratic parties had their anti-communism and pro-American orientation confirmed by the events of 1956. The Hungarian Revolution was a decisive stage in the evolution of the process of deStalinisation, but that had its limits and was taken furthest in the Italian Party, though even there this was more among intellectuals rather than workers. I am inclined to agree with the conclusion reached by Kende in the collective volume edited by Gyorgy Litvan on reform, revolt and repression in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Kende calls the Hungarian revolution an 'anti-totalitarian revolution', which 'exploded the political (and philosophical!) fiction of proletarian socialism', by which term he presumably refers to Soviet-style communism. I also think he is right to argue that '1989 was the continuation and fulfilment of 1956, the radical rejection of the entire system, for which the Hungarian Revolution was the primary historical precedent'. As for its impact on the *Western* Left, I believe it did give a huge impetus to the movements of the 1960s which were in many respects animated by ideas of the New Left, by a rejection of Stalinist Communism and the aspiration to combine democracy and socialism. However, though I do not want to end on a negative note, it is doubtful how much of these ideas still live on in the very different climate of the contemporary world, ravaged as it is by the destructive impact of neo-liberalism and the rise of contemporary populisms which have nothing to do with socialism and with the traditional politics of the Left.