# Globalising (and provincialising) 1956: introductory comments

*Kevin Morgan*

To paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss, there could be no twentieth-century communism without dates. Lévi-Strauss was speaking of history in general but had in mind the relations of 'before' and 'after' that for communists were the foundation and original motive force of their programme and philosophy. Communism, at least in its early years, was not a movement of the longue durée but one of great leaps forward, of alternating periods of crisis and stabilisation, of days that shook the world that, in Lenin's words, could be the 'concentrated essence of years'. Communism was a movement for fashioning the before into the after, not through the incremental 'level time' of reformism, but in sudden shifts of tempo, crystallised in the moments by which it marked historical time and commemorated in the form of anniversaries.[1] As with everything in this most vertical of movements there was also a hierarchy of dates: from local flashpoints and leaders' birthdays through to national litanies – one even bore the title *Great Dates of the Vietnamese Workers' Party*. Historians of communism have also caught the bug and, more than most, can seem fixated on its anniversaries as the markers for posterity of this ultimate *histoire événementielle*.

There were also the 'global moments' that provided the measure of communism's ambitions as a world movement for change. In the *Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* – among the finest single-volume overviews we have – five such moments are identified as the means of tracing communism's development over time.[2] In other accounts, only two or perhaps three of these dates really matter. For Eric Hobsbawm they were 1917 and 1956: the two 'ten days that shook the world' of twentieth-century communism that in each case 'divided

it suddenly and irrevocably into a "before" and "after"' in a way unparalleled by any other great political movement. Viewing things not from London but from Leningrad, the great archaeologist Leo S. Klejn remembered 1956 in much the same way but with a gesture to the third date and denouement that was 1989: 'The entire world of Marxism was shattered, and this was the beginning of the end of Communism'. The Great Dates of World Communism had become the register of how it set off with the future in its hands, stumbled into moments of crisis and dissension, and finally, as a world movement, collapsed back into the past. 'To put it in the simplest terms', said Hobsbawm, 'the October Revolution created a world communist movement, the Twentieth Congress destroyed it.'[3]

The events to which he referred will be familiar to any reader of *Twentieth Century Communism*. The twentieth congress was that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held in Moscow in February 1956 with reportedly fifty-five fraternal delegations in attendance. This was the first such congress since Stalin's death three years earlier and only the third since the so-called Congress of Victors which in 1934 set the seal on his ascendancy. In a final closed session from which the foreign delegations were excluded, Stalin's successor Khrushchev provided a devastating if politically evasive disclosure of some of the worst of his crimes. Khrushchev had good reason to be evasive for, as one of Stalin's epigones, his career had flourished in just the period in which these crimes were committed. There were few among the fraternal delegations of which the same could not be said and many who would seek to keep the lid on this unlooked-for Pandora's box. Employing a 'Stalinist practice of "unmasking"' that was thus 'embodied in the project of de-Stalinization from the start', Khrushchev clutched at the explanation of the cult of an individual as if this were an alibi for the movement that had mobilised around this cult.[4]

Here with a vengeance was a before and after that at the same time blew apart the idea of communism, as Zhdanov once put it, as history's key to 'consistently advancing from one stage to the next'. As details of the speech seeped into the public domain they opened up divisions which at every level of the communist movement destroyed the unity of purpose and direction that Hobsbawm had had in mind. The

knock-on effects were most immediately felt in eastern Europe and by those leaders and regimes most plausibly depicted as Stalin's creatures. In Poland in late June a workers' revolt in Poznań was put down with dozens of deaths. In Hungary in early November Soviet troops put down a rising which looked just like a revolution but which communists were meant to see as a counter-revolution. Defections from many communist parties peaked as the promise of renewal, which was also a part of the story of 1956, was seemingly dashed. The ten days (actually twelve) of the twentieth congress had been the signal for destalinisation but with nothing like consensus as to what precisely this meant, whether it required the reform or repudiation of communist parties or whether indeed it were not, as many communist loyalists saw it, a hindrance, a distraction, a betrayal or just an irrelevance.

This is not the first of these global moments to be marked by *Twentieth Century Communism*. Our third issue in 2011 centred on that other great symbolic date of 1968: one again evoking the rumbling of workers' tanks, as if re-enacting the logic of '56, but also a host of histories just beginning in the spaces that 1956 had helped to open up.[5] More recently, to mark the centenary of the Bolshevik revolution the journal sponsored a symposium in Lausanne focusing on commemorations of the revolution's anniversary and resulting in a themed journal issue and book.[6]

In turning to 1956, this and our immediately following issue also draw on a colloquium, held in London in April 2024, but with a slightly different frame of reference. The global reach of 1917 had never been in question, least of all on its centenary. In approaching it thematically through the collective memory of the left our aim within this very crowded field was to open up distinctive themes and perspectives across the whole period to 1991, thus making connections across time. 1956 posed a different challenge. Of the global moments in the *Oxford Handbook*, its treatment stands out there by not being global at all but exclusively a matter of a handful of ruling parties. The secret speech, Poland, Hungary, China: these are the dominant themes, and there is a rich literature to draw on in exploring them.[7] Studies of individual communist parties provide further documentation of interactions with these events; exceptionally, as in respect of the French and Italian

parties, comparison extends to more than one party, including their relations with each other, and Roger Martelli has incorporated this dimension into a broader study of the 'communist 1956'.[8] Nevertheless, this focus on the Cominform plus China, as valid for its purposes as it obviously is, can hardly account for the whole of Hobsbawm's 'world communist movement'; and, moreover, it implies a perspective decidedly orientated more towards Hobsbawm's 'before' than his 'after'. Under the rubric of a global 1956, we wondered what would emerge from trawling beyond the most familiar cases, or seeking out the less familiar stories within them, or merely juxtaposing them for a sense of the often all too little explored connections between them.

With this our only agenda, the call for papers was broad and non-prescriptive. Materials assembled in this fashion could in no sense be comprehensive, but we also felt that this was no less true of accounts that foreground well-known landmarks. We therefore hoped for a depth of treatment, whether socially, thematically or biographically, that would be at once both more and less than panoramic. In setting out lines of enquiry that will, we hope, be followed up in future research, the papers presented in London raised at least as many questions as they answered, which was in essence just the outcome we intended. On the other hand, we were very conscious of the limitations of the geographical coverage in particular. Using a hybrid on-line/in-person format we were better able to reach beyond predominantly European networks than we had been in marking 1917 and 1968. Nevertheless, and given the importance in 1956 of events in Egypt and Algeria, we were acutely aware of having nothing in the discussion regarding the whole continent of Africa, where 1956, as discussed in another issue of *Twentieth Century Communism*, has its claims as a key moment in the communist world's turning out towards these 'distant fronts'.[9] There is still work to be done in connecting these histories.

## Themes

As the workshop was taking shape, we took encouragement from the publication of a Paris colloquium on the 'worlds of 1848' that

reconfigured Europe's year of revolutions as another global moment and arguably the first on such a scale.[10] We noted the volume's wide optic, encompassing disparate national cases and both transnational and transimperial connections. We read of a world-view centred in this earlier period not on Moscow but on Paris; and, as contributors seeking to globalise 1848 recovered the tangled lines and chronology that this sometimes obscured, noted how they reached for the lexicon of 1956 and the notion of the 'polycentric'.[11] We also followed the life histories of nineteenth-century migrants and political refugees as they remembered old ideals in new environments; and we were pleased when in our own smaller sample of case studies the shared themes of the individual life-history, faction, ideology and generation all figured. In just a single day's presentations there was a limit to what we could hope to cover. Even so, in the making and breaking of Hobsbawm's world movement, to which there was as yet no counterpart in 1848, it was quickly apparent that the case for a polycentric 1956 is, if anything, even more compelling.

At the same time, it is the date itself that implies a centre, like a terminus in time to and from which all roads lead, as they might through Rome itself. There is thus a potential incongruity in adopting a centrifugal conception of space and place but not of time – leaving without challenge the regal dominion of the date. It is easy to come to this view thinking of 1848 not in Paris but in London; for if Britain was the damp squib of the year of revolutions it was because the truly convulsive movement of Chartism had peaked a decade earlier, and registers more as a source and inspiration for the ideologies of 1848 than as the vehicle that could make them effective. 'Not all people exist in the same Now', wrote Ernst Bloch, and nor did all peoples and movements exist in the same 1848 or 1956.[12] To begin our histories with a date can never do justice to a world of uneven development.

The story of 1848 was, of course, one of no single dominant movement like communism, let alone of its material transactions and international codes of discipline. It was instead one of democratic, national, social and abolitionist movements interconnecting and sometimes conflicting. This may suggest a basic category difference with the reputedly monolithic character of communism – what one of the malcontents of 1956

recalled as 'a monolithic organisation hewed from a single block [and] possessing a single will'.[13] On the other hand, in 1956 no less than 1848 there can be no proper understanding even of a monolith unless we locate it within the world of multiple fissures which its monolithic object was to transform. If 1956, even by a ten- or twelve-day calculus, appears as a truly global moment, it is because of the synchronisation of the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt at the beginning of November. In other words, it represented a crisis of western colonialism just as much as stalinism; and when the young Perry Anderson enrolled at Oxford that autumn he found a campus seething with political debate, 'but not just on one thing like the Vietnam war … you had these two completely different [things]: what was going on in Europe, and as it were that's communism, and at the same time what's going on in the Middle East, that's to do with colonialism, imperialism and its sequel'.[14]

The convergence was nevertheless not structural but contingent. This was not a cold-war Sarajevo in which each new contradiction fed off the others. From a viewpoint like Anderson's Oxford, it may have seemed that only the European element within this dual crisis was identified with communism; and this is largely how the story of the 'communist 1956' has been written. But if Europe 'as it were' meant communism in crisis, events elsewhere encouraged new lines of insurgency and critique, ones that gouged great holes in the monolith while at the same time helping to stabilise or reinforce the appeals that it had traditionally exercised. It is sometimes too easily forgotten, including by the present writer, that in the shorter-term aftermath of 1956 the membership of many communist parties did not further decline but recovered.

A striking feature to emerge from the workshop was the distinction between, on the one hand, those parties for whom this was in many cases a moment of reckoning for communism 'as an existential choice', and those, on the other, in which its meaning as a 'hinge' year was implicitly or explicitly relativised.[15] We shall read in this issue of cases that vividly attest the dilemmas of communist intellectuals in casting aside what had once seemed the fixity of their political moorings; and we shall find them in parties like those of Poland and Italy where the sense of dislocation cut

through particularly sharply. In other cases there was little of this sense that this was the only, or the main, political hinge, or even that it was such a hinge at all. Doubtless this is among the reasons for our receiving no offers of papers regarding sub-Saharan Africa. To different degrees it seemed the same story in Mexico and Cyprus, which we consider in our second issue, and in India and Japan, on which we heard papers which sadly were not able to be revised for publication. As the day's discussion shifted from one viewpoint to another we realised how strong a case there was for provincialising as well as globalising 1956.

In using these terms as our two issues' titles we imply no hard-and-fast division between them. Rather, we see them as complementary facets of a multifarious field of enquiry that was nevertheless one of multiple shared if contested points of reference. This increasing contestation was, indeed, one of the key meanings of 1956. Provincialising this experience can serve as recognition of demonstrable geographical or political distance from the so-called communist peripheries that were also their own centre. At the same time, it could serve as a technique of dissociation and damage limitation that managed the pressures for accountability, as if the Khrushchev revelations were only a matter of Soviet history. 'What are our responsibilities?', asked even the French communist leader Thorez, as the substance of the revelations became public knowledge. 'Nil in the sense that we have not have been exercising dictatorship in the USSR.'[16] Thorez had lived for years as a virtual pensioner of the same dictatorship and the audacity of this remark was further compounded by his having been the object of one of the most immoderate of the cults of personality. Nevertheless, even in France in 1956, the virulence of anti-communism, paradoxically, helped to shore up party loyalties as ranks closed against the still impending outside threat. How much more plausible must such a position have been in parties with long histories of suffering persecution and little direct experience of its perpetration within the communist world itself.

In opening up these questions it is impossible to think of a global 1956 without introducing what might be called a long 1956. In other contexts such an approach is anything but original. Of the *Oxford Handbook*'s global moments most are approached with a bifocal lens

that takes in both the bounded notion of the year as symbol and caesura and a broader conception of processes suddenly erupting into visibility, as they did for example in 1989.[17] 1968 has also been identified with a 'long 1960s' and taken as 'a rhetorical figure … for all the diverse social and political movements taking place around that time throughout the world'.[18] Our own treatment of the subject had the title '1968 and after', and Maud Anne Bracke, who contributed to it, adopts a similar approach in the *Oxford Handbook*. Tim Rees takes 1936, which could just as well be any year of the popular front and Yezhovshchina. Jean-François Fayet, prime mover of our own discussion of the 'Echoes of October', takes the almost iconoclastic stance of disregarding 1917 for his chosen global moment of 1919, as the deciding year of the European and world revolution on which the Bolsheviks believed that theirs ultimately depended.

1956 alone is not approached in this way, either in the *Oxford Handbook* or in accounts of the type of 'The Death of Uncle Joe' or 'The Day the Party had to Stop'.[19] It is nevertheless telling that, even as they gathered to commemorate the moment's half-centenary, historians of French communism seemed to find a sort of common ground in relativising the idea of 1956 as a moment of rupture.[20] The elasticity of this longer view stretches backward as well as forward. On the narrowest view, the wrestling with the legacies of stalinism may be traced from the year of Stalin's death, as when Verdès-Leroux referred not to ten days but three years that shook the communist world.[21] Even this, however, cannot quite capture how the reverberations continued across the decade. If there was a culminating point, it was arguably 1960-1, as polycentrism descended into the open antagonism of the Sino-Soviet split, and as destalinisation's high water mark in the Soviet Union was signalled by the CPSU's twenty-second congress and the disembalming of the dictator himself.

'Really any date seemed good to me provided it was in the past', wrote Régis Debray in his personal history *Praised Be Our Lords*. Debray, in fact, highlighted not any date but 1917 and 1956, just like Hobsbawm; but the latter, within Debray's personal imaginary, symbolised the displacement of Red Petrograd by the beginnings in the Sierra Maestra of the Cuban revolution which triumphed two years later.[22] Debray, as

so often, was being wilfully contrarian; but his idiosyncratic 1956 does remind us that a date without a sense of place is beyond what the human mind can truly grasp and that the linking of date and place, if not quite arbitrary, is always an act of simplification. With this in mind we turn to four different perspectives on what the sense of a global 1956 might actually mean.

## From Poland, Italy, China, Greece …

Relativising this or any other hinge moment does not imply either minimising or denying the role of events and public actions in either individual life-histories orthe development of movements like communism. It does imply locating these moments within longer-term trajectories, whether of individuals, groups or institutions, and recognising the specificities of effect that they produced. The first of our papers, on the Polish marxist and later commentator on marxism Leszek Kolakowski, illustrates the point very well. For British observers of 1956 as watershed moment and *lieu de mémoire*, Kolakowski, not entirely by his own decision, has become one of its best-known symbols. As Artur Banaszewski describes here, Kolakowski's writings of the destalinising mid-1950s were widely reproduced in the West, particularly in French translation. The leading British communist defector, E.P. Thompson, was one of their readers; and nearly two decades later Thompson addressed Kolakowski in a book-length open letter that styled him the epitome of the shared political moment of 1956 that communist revisionists had experienced in different ways in different countries.[23] Few have surpassed Thompson in depicting 1956 as a crucible in which all who lived through it were tested. Kolakowski, having passed the test, had failed the sequel, having moved far from the dissenting communism that Thompson believed the true legatee of their common moment.

Artur Banaszewski provides us with a sharp appraisal of Kolakowski's writings in and either side of 1956. Approaching these through Kolakowski's earlier intellectual biography, he shows how well-prepared he was to seize the moment of the Khrushchev speech and the liberalising 'Polish October' that had caught the imagination of Thompson

and his fellow '"Easterners" in the heart of the enlightened "West"'.[24] Thompson, of course, invoked East and West to ironic effect and wrote that he would trade in ten volumes of Karl Popper for Kolakowski's 'Responsibility and History'. His letter also addressed the consequent ambiguities of Kolakowski's thinking and public positioning as a 'western-style' marxist in the heart of the benighted East already susceptible to the competing claims and appropriations we learn about from Banaszewski. Thompson could have picked on any number of ideological adversaries in 1973; that he fastened on Kolakowski was a way of holding him to those principles of 1956 which Thompson's critics, like Perry Anderson, held that he too readily mythologised.[25] Disappointed as the moment passed, Kolakowski relapsed into a relatively quiescent party membership until his expulsion from both party and country and rediscovery of his political voice in the mid-1960s.

A doubtless inflated assessment of Kolakowski's later role in the cultural Cold War is that of a 'Koestler of the 70s'.[26] The Italian intellectuals Fabrizio Onofri and Eugenio Reale may never have enjoyed the same international repute, nor did their careers require their physical as well as ideological transplantation across the cold-war divide. Although the Italian communist party (PCI) had a powerful social presence and political apparatus, it could not exercise the sanctions or controls which a ruling party like Poland's was for the time being able to reimpose. Onofri and Reale may represent those communist 'Easterners' in the West for whom 1956 meant coming to see this external allegiance as the flaw and contradiction in their party's world-view, and at last looking upon the East as well as West with an open and critical gaze. As Mark Gilbert and Tommaso Milani describe, one can in both cases see the signs of potential misgivings in the years immediately preceding 1956. This perhaps helps explain why Onofri and Reale were among those who reacted with such vigour to the Khrushchev speech that the second and clinching disillusionment of repression in Hungary was hardly necessary. Here there truly was a cathartic moment of awakening – the opportunity to voice to their views with a freedom that, for the better part of a decade, was subsequently to elude Kolakowski.

Comparison of Onofri and Reale also shows how post-56 trajectories could diverge. Though he was evidently drawn by some notion

of a third way, Onofri appears to have remained within the foundational political cleavage that Norberto Bobbio, refracting Italy's post-war experience, would later describe as lying between left and right.[27] Reale, like Koestler or perhaps 'the Koestler of the 70s', was less fastidious than Onofri in his connections and sources of support, as he, again like Koestler, will have observed that communists so often were in pursuit of their own cause. His story becomes one that gets filed away as anti-communism. Onofri's resists any such simple categorisation and there is perhaps an irony in his being driven from the PCI by the dashing of the hopes he initially had in 1956 for its critical renewal. Against his expectations, the PCI did not then suffer long-term electoral disadvantage, but quite the contrary consolidated itself as the majority party of the Italian left. As we learn here, this may have been among the factors driving Reale towards a neo-cold-war binary logic that in countries with weaker communist parties, like Thompson's, was more easily circumvented. Onofri, in steering a more measured course, achieved his independent critical voice through *Tempi Moderni*. One may conjecture how far such pressures from without assisted in the 'cautious diversification of Communist orthodoxies' (Thompson's phrase) that included some elements of the renewal he had hoped for, and in which the PCI was seen by many as leading the way in Europe.[28]

It was certainly no simple legacy of the Togliatti whose cautiousness as presented here seems impossible to distinguish from the realpolitik that had helped make him one of stalinism's great survivors. Even so, Togliatti's interview with *Nuovi Argomenti*, like the Polish October, provided a point of reference for both loyalists and dissenters internationally; and when this position was seemingly confirmed, as the PCI avoided the impasse into which its French sister party was seen to be sinking, political suppleness and savoir faire were perhaps too easily mythologised by some as strategic genius.

China was another of these points of reference and potentially the most consequential of them: for, in bearing the kudos of the century's second great communist revolution, it alone could potentially have sufficient presence and authority to offer both alternative and reproof to the post-twentieth congress CPSU. The result in due course was

the Sino-Soviet split; and, as Sergey Radchenko reminds us, it was immediately following the Khrushchev revelations that Mao saw the opportunity to assert his claim to moral leadership and the role of 'arbiter of the communist world'.[29] More specifically, in April 1956 the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) *People's Daily* published an editorial 'On the historical experiences of the dictatorship of the proletariat' which, like Togliatti's interview with *Nuovi Argomenti*, was to be among the year's most widely cited and circulated communist texts.

In the months that followed the twentieth congress there were numerous congresses of other national parties that sought to absorb or just to deflect or evade its implications. None of these was more significant than the eighth national congress of the CCP, announced in July 1956 and convening in September. The timing alone was suggestive, for this was the CCP's first national congress since 1945. Following its reconvening for a 'second session' in May 1958, it was also the last until 1969 and the only congress to invite a broad spectrum of international attendees. Though the congress has an important place in histories of the CCP, this aspect of the proceedings has attracted much less notice and in the context of a global 1956 suggests themes that would merit further exploration than was possible here (see separate research note).

Yidi Wu's paper here reminds us that these were two-way interactions and that it is no less important to deal with the stimulus to movements inside China from without. This was at first licensed from above in the guise of the Hundred Flowers campaign launched by the CCP in the spring of 1956. But Yidi Wu reminds us that there can be no understanding of the political ferment that resulted without a recognition of the movements from below that seemed as if only waiting for this opportunity. As Mao and the CCP leadership also sought to navigate the potentially treacherous waters of destalinisation, there was both a distancing from key aspects of Khrushchev's judgment on Stalin and a policy of 'open-door rectification' that ranged more widely than anything, it would appear, that Togliatti would willingly have countenanced. As discussions extended to the very nature of socialism and personality cults that included Mao's own, the ruling conundrum of 1956, of a controlled reform and liberalisation that would not of its own

volition become uncontrollable, was here played out as it would be again in the late 1980s – with the same basic result.

Students were at the heart of the flowering of 1957, which some in China likened to the famous May Fourth Movement. That is a reminder of the importance of specifically national traditions and resources: 1919 and 1989 as well as 1957 were in China all moments identified with an upsurge of student activism. The importance of Yidi Wu's account in the present context is that she demonstrates the students' eagerness to draw lessons and inspiration from the international communist movement. Going beyond better-known examples like Lin Xiling, she draws upon an extensive programme of interviews to show how what she calls a window of students speaking up was also a window onto this wider communist world. Exactly as in Hungary and Poland, the window was the following year slammed shut again, and these voices were for a long period stifled, as they were in Kolakowski's Poland.

Another of Hobsbawm's reflections on 1956 was that the crucial issue of that year, which he said was that of Stalin, was 'literally one of history'.[30] Our final article on the Greek communist party (KKE) shows that this could never be confined to the history that Khrushchev so carefully delimited to that of Stalin, who was no longer there to answer for it. It could mean the holding to account of other communist leaders, like Hungary's Rákosi or Bulgaria's Chervenkov, or occasionally their vindication, like Władysław Gomulka.[31] It could also mean reviewing past phases of communist policy in the light of twentieth-congress positions, not only in relation to the question of collective leadership but also to the possibility in different cases of a peaceful transition to socialism. In the KKE's case, these elements combined in the removal of the party's general secretary, Nikos Zachariadis, who was ousted by decision of a committee convened at the twentieth congress itself.

While the charges against Zachariadis included the congress refrain of a cult of personality, the substance of the allegations of leftism and sectarianism in his conduct of the party can be traced much further back. Moreover, the methods used against him offer little suggestion of a break with the practices of the Stalin period. In a party led from exile like the KKE, decisions were always and necessarily matters of deliberation and decision across national boundaries. In the case of the

committee set up at the twentieth congress, the membership was drawn exclusively from Europe's ruling communist parties and pronounced on these matters entirely in the manner of the Cominform. As these decisions were then taken up for confirmation by an enlarged plenum of the KKE held in Bucharest, the results included a reworking of the official party narrative of the 1940s that would endure for decades. The KKE was not among those communist parties which in 1956 set about the writing of official party histories as a way of controlling this now highly contested communist past. Instead, as Koukouna shows, matters of political strategy became intertwined with perceptions of the party's collective memory and of the remembering or forgetting of the 'heroes and martyrs' of the civil war. The fascinating story of resistance novels like those of Stratis Papaefstratiou shows us just how much and how little had changed as a result of 1956.

*

The nuancing of these themes will be continued in a second issue of the journal which will include perspectives from Spain, Martinique and international Trotskyism as well as Mexico and Cyprus. A provisional assessment is nevertheless possible. Hundreds of thousands of communists were deeply affected by 1956. They were not, however, scattered evenly over space or time. This truly was a momentous year on a global scale; but at the level of both party and individual its construction as '1956' also bears the strong imprint of place and generation: within the USSR, of course, and on an international scale in the predominantly European experiences of popular front, anti-fascism and people's democracy. This centring on Europe was one of the things that '1956' helped change, and while the delegates from Poland and Italy were not meeting for the first time, their gathering not only in Moscow but Beijing with those from Asia, Latin America, Australasia and the middle east was one of the symbols of that change.

For Hobsbawm, who recalled it as 'the beginning of the end for most of us', it was a time he preferred not to commemorate but to forget. 'It's all very well to plug along on the left in our various ways, doing what we can, but I've never since 1956 felt that the movement is something one can any longer devote one's life to.'[32] As a statement of personal record

that rings true. Since Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall, Hobsbawm continued, nobody had managed to put him together again: the ideal of a movement in the image of Humpty Dumpty was dead. But probably communism had never truly been that anyway.

## Notes

1 Régis Debray 'Time and politics' [1970] in idem, *Prison Writings*, New York: Random House, 1973, pp90-2.
2 Stephen A. Smith (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp109-84.
3 Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times. A twentieth-century life*, London: Allen Lane, 2002, p201.
4 Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma. Rethinking the stalinist past in the Soviet Union*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013 , p31.
5 '1968 and after', *TCC*, 3, 2011.
6 'October, the Cold War and commemoration: solidarity at a safe distance?', *TCC*, 13, 2017; Jean-François Fayet et al (eds), *Echoes of October. International commemorations of the Bolshevik revolution 1918-1990*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2017.
7 Sergey Radchenko, '1956' in Smith, *Oxford Handbook*, pp140-55.
8 Roger Martelli, *1956 communiste. Le glas d'une espérance*, Paris: La Dispute, 2006. Drawing on her doctoral research on grassroots responses to the events of 1956, Fiona Haig has developed this line of comparison in articles like 'The Poznań uprising of 1956 as viewed by French and Italian communists', *Cold War Studies*, Vol 18 No 2, 2016, pp160-87; for the same comparison at a leadership and institutional level see Marc Lazar, *Maisons Rouges. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours*, Paris: Aubier, 1992, ch. 3.
9 Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: the USSR in West Africa and the Congo 1956-1964*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010; also 'Communist states and postwar Africa', *TCC*, 15, 2018, and, more specifically, Istvan Tarrosy, 'Hungarian foreign policy towards Africa during communism and in the post-Soviet era', pp92-111.
10 Quentin Deluermoz, Emmanuel Fureix and Clément Thibaud (eds), *Les mondes de 1848. Au-delà du printemps des peoples*, Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2023.

11 'Introduction générale' in *Deluermoz et al, Mondes, p9.*
12 Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, p97.
13 Malcolm MacEwen citing Stalin, 'The day the party had to stop', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), *The Socialist Register 1976*, London: Merlin, 1976, p36.
14 'Conversation with history: Perry Anderson', University of California Television, 21 January 2008: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjTKsRfVM9Q.
15 See Brigitte Studer, 'Communism as existential choice', in Silvio Pons and Stephen Smith (eds), *The Cambridge History of Communism. Volume 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp503-23; for 1956 as hinge year see Martelli, *1956*.
16 Cited Martelli, *1956*, p46.
17 See Matthias Middell's contribution on 1989 which outlines just such an approach, Smith, *Oxford Handbook*, pp171-84.
18 Avishek Ganguly, 'Politics and periodicals in the 1960s: readings around the "Naxalite movement"', in Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett (eds), *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, New York: Bergahn, 2013, pp57-8.
19 See MacEwen as cited above; also Alison Macleod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, London: Merlin, 1995.
20 As noted by Frédéric Genevée in Pascal Carreau (ed.), *Le Parti communiste français et l'année 1956*, Paris: Fondation Gabriel Péri, 2006, p241.
21 Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Au service du parti. Le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1944-1956)*, Paris: Fayard/Editions de Minuit, 1983, pp429-36.
22 Régis Debray, *Praised Be Our Lords. A political education*, London: Verso, 2007, pp62-3.
23 E.P. Thompson, 'An open letter to Leszek Kolakowski' in idem, *The Poverty of Theory and other essays*, London: Merlin, 1979, pp93-4. Thompson singles out the article 'Responsibility and history' as one of 'the few constructive and enduring consequences' of the experience.
24 Thompson, 'Open letter', p97.
25 Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, London: Verso, 1980, ch. 4.
26 Anderson, *Arguments*, p108.
27 Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right. The significance of a political distinction*,1994.
28 Thompson, 'Open letter', p96.
29 Radchenko, '1956', p149.

30 Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in Maurice Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes: essays in honour of A L Morton*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, p41.

31 For which see Balázs Apor, *The Invisible Shining. The cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary 1945-1956*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017, ch. 10.

32 Hobsbawm to Brian Pearce, 15 January 1979, University of Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS 937/6/4/6.