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to behave with the weary responsibility of parents.

If the result of such an eclectic approach is occasionally something of a roller-coaster ride, this is lavished in the bad-humored output of some splendid — and often very funny — authors. This is a rare chance to read some of Mitteleuropa’s best essayists, a seam of talent still under-explored by Western publishers.

Beatriz Novy’s “Micky-Maus Kommunisten”, a valedictory to Austria’s pre-1989 radical-left culture, revisits the members of Roter Börsenkrach, a group which, emboldened by the insight that capitalism did not need to be fought because it would destroy itself from within, left the economics faculty of Vienna University in 1974 to found an “anti-versity”. Now captains of industry and professors at stubbornly conventional universities, its members recall the years when one of their number was so enthralled by Hegel that he “practically only spoke Hegelian”.

This provides an enticing admission of the reminiscences which will be indulged in a couple of decades’ time in Grinzing retirement homes for octogenarian hippies.

The journal’s Vienna base (at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen) provides fruitful distance from German views of 1989 and also a useful forum for writing on today’s Austria — a neglected and intriguing subject. Here, Janos Matyas Kovacs examines the populist Austrian and Hungarian politicians Jörg Haider and Jozsef Torgyan and finds them united in forging post-modern, nationalist politics. The previous issue featured an adept comparison of the way both Austria and East Germany are beholden to and resentful of the Federal Republic.

Transt is a most welcome addition to intellec-

tual periodicals. It has the ambience of Mitteleuropa at its most accessible — the reading equivalent of an afternoon spent in a coffee-house, arguing about the future with lively companions, surrounded by the gild and violins of the past. Its real achievement is to produce a relaxed and natural setting for discourse between Eastern and Western Europe, without the edge of resentment or mutual misunderstandings that have so often beset such undertakings. It is a timely reminder that the essay is not dead — just not published widely enough. I have not read any journal in German since 1989 that I would so like to see translated into English in order to give it the wider audience it deserves.

Anne McElvoy

History

Past and Present

Published four times a year since 1969, Past and Present has the reputation of being the liveliest, most provocative and most prestigious of British historical journals. Yet it began publication in very inauspicious circumstances in 1952. It was the brainchild of John Morris, a member of the Historians’ Group of the British Communist Party which acted as midwife. The Group sought a forum not only for the Party, nor even exclusively for Marxists, but also for non-Marxist historians sympathetic to their approach to history, and concern for preserving its claims. Perhaps curiously, these, as they were spelled out in the manifesto of the first number, were not to uphold dialectical materialism against British empiricism, but to defend “scientific history” against a perceived threat to it from European social science.

To launch a mainly Marxist historical journal at the height of the Cold War was a particularly bold undertaking, for Western historians were not then noted for their tolerance of Marxism. The president of the American Historical Association had addressed that society in 1949 on “the social responsibilities of the historian,” asserting that “total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist.” The British community of historians was less intolerant, yet, as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, “for those not already in academic posts before the cold-war blacklist- ing began in the spring of 1948, the chances of university teaching were to be virtually zero for the next ten years”. It was therefore the more remarkable that, at a time when their colleagues across the Atlantic were lowering their heads behind the parapet, British Marxists launched a new journal.

It borrowed its title from a series “designed to show how history can help” and, while it might not endorse so simple a policy these days, it is nevertheless still committed to the view that the past is relevant to the present against those who argue that it should be studied “for its own sake”. It did, however, loosen its ties to a particular view of its relevance in 1958, when it dropped the subtitle “a journal of scientific history”, and adopted the more neutral “journal of historical studies” which it still carries. Other changes occurred in the late 1950s, reflecting the traumatic impact of events such as the Hungarian uprising on Communists, Marxists and what their critics at the time referred to pejoratively as “fellow travellers”. Thus the editorial board was significantly enlarged, adding a number of non-Marxists into its ranks. (The board is an important feature of Past and Present, which endeavours to scrutinize all submissions to the journal for collective as well as editorial approval. This is perhaps why historians widely regard it as the most difficult periodical in which to get articles accepted, though without comparative figures of the ratio of submissions to acceptances by the leading British journals, this rumour cannot be substantiated.) Another development of those years was the establishment of the Past and Present society, which is responsible for the journal’s publication and organizes conferences on particular themes, some of which have resulted in volumes of essays published as supplements to the journal itself.

Following these changes, the decades of the 1960s and 70s were characterized by a much more congenial atmosphere in which Past and Present could flourish. Several explanations can be suggested for this transformation in its fortunes. The rise of the new universities broke the stranglehold of empiricism exerted by traditional schools of history, treating conceptual approaches such as that of the Annales school — with which the British journal had a close affinity — more sympathetically. This was accompanied by a general switch of emphasis by historians away from political history towards social and cultural themes, which Past and Present had emphasized from the start. Above all, Marxism became acceptable in the leftwards swing of