

Abstract

Interpreting the Prague Spring: Between Disillusion, Mourning and Melancholy.

This essay seeks to raise the question of how the Prague Spring and its suppression mattered for the subsequent history of the European Left. Did its defeat, by allegedly expelling any genuinely democratic socialism into the realm of utopia, contribute to the overall decline of left-wing militancy? Within this problematic, I first touch upon the conceptual pair of 'illusion' and 'disillusion' that has significantly shaped the post-1968 discourse on the Left. Second, I suggest a perspective on the Prague Spring (and on waning socialism in general) that draws on the recent debates on the importance of melancholia and mourning for the history of socialism. Can the sense of loss have a productive, transformative effect? I conclude by proposing several aspects of socialism's decline, considering how the working through these defeats might be turned into a resource for the reconstruction of the Left.

Keywords: Disillusion, European Left, Melancholy, Mourning, Post-Stalinism, Prague Spring, Reform Communism, 1968.