



Marxism, Humanism, Revisionism
in Czechoslovakia and Poland

*December 17, 2016 Warsaw,
Staszic Palace, room 242*



Marxism, Humanism, Revisionism

in Czechoslovakia and Poland

11.00-13.00

Opening

Prof. Magdalena Mikołajczyk, PhD, Pedagogical University of Kraków
Marxism - Socialism - Democracy in the Thought of Polish Revisionists
in the 1950s and 60s: Coincidence or Collision?

Jan Mervart, PhD, Czech Academy of Sciences
Marxist Humanism as a Specific Project of Post-Stalinist Modernity

Michał Siermiński, University of Warsaw
The Decade of Breakthrough: The Polish Left Opposition 1968-1980. From
Workers' Democracy to National Paternalism

13.00-13.15 - Break

13.00-15.00

Petr Kužel, PhD, Czech Academy of Sciences
The Political Thought of Egon Bondy: Marxist Criticism of Soviet-type
Society in Czechoslovakia

Paweł Szelegieniec, Jagiellonian University
The Struggle for Workers' Councils: From The Factory Movement to Bure-
aucratic Neutralization, 1956-1960 in Poland

Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska, PhD
IW „Książka i Prasa”/grad.GSSR
The Anti-Nationalism of Very Young Communists in Poland after WW2

15.00-16.15 - Lunch Break

16.15-17.50

Joe Grim Feinberg, PhD, Czech Academy of Sciences
Ivan Svitak's Surrealist Humanism

Jakub Nikodem, University of Warsaw
The Heterodox Marxism of Marek J. Siemek

Monika Woźniak, University of Warsaw
Adam Schaff in the Eyes of Evald Ilyenkov

17.50-18.00 - Break

18.00-20.00

Plenary Debate
Marxist Humanism and Workers' Self-Management

Prof. Magdalena Mikołajczyk, PhD
Pedagogical University of Kraków

Marxism - Socialism - Democracy in the Thought of Polish Revisionists
in the 1950s and 60s: Coincidence or Collision?

This presentation will consider three issues. Firstly, how revisionism and revisionists were conceptualized in the discourse and polemics of participants in the Communist movement representing different generations, experiences, and visions of politics and its doctrinal bases (historical context). Secondly, the set of concepts and keywords typical for the revisionist current, derived partly from Marxist terminology and partly from other fields of interest, and seen by Communist leadership as revisionist (political perspective). Thirdly, ways of persuasion and argumentation that were widely used by revisionist intellectuals but were not explicitly mentioned in their discourse, because the accusation of being revisionist and limited their communicative possibilities - for instance, parallels with religion (dogma and heresy) were often exploited; revisionists' pro-democratic orientation could be inferred from the Party's criticism of them rather than from their own expressions (communicative context).

Jan Mervart, PhD
Czech Academy of Sciences

Marxist Humanism as a Specific Project of Post-Stalinist Modernity

This paper is devoted to Marxist humanism, especially to its Czechoslovak variant. The author defines the most significant aspects of this intellectual current and places the current into the historical context of Czechoslovakia and of East-Central Europe. Marxist humanism, which is typically interpreted as an anthropocentric turn, is introduced as a specific project of post-Stalinist modernity. In doing so, the author moves from Marxist humanist concept of the human being" to the way Marxist humanists conceptualized progress, socialism, and the fulfillment of history..

At the same time, the author pays attention to the question of how Marxist humanists coped with the Stalinist master narrative of Zdeněk Nejedlý, based on a relatively conservative understanding of culture, the nation and history. Marxist humanism is approached here, however, as a specific reinterpretation of former Stalinist goals rather than as de-Stalinization and, thus, as a completely new way of thinking.

The Decade of Breakthrough: The Polish Left Opposition 1968-1980. From Workers' Democracy to National Paternalism

I will present my book *The Decade of Breakthrough* (December 2016), in which I undertake an in-depth analysis of the discourse produced between 1968 and 1980 by the Polish leftist anti-communist intelligentsia. The first half of the 1970s in Poland is a period of a particularly compelling transformation of the mindset of the Polish post-revisionist opposition. In 1976, after years of heated discussions triggered by the shock that the intelligentsia experienced after the events of March 1968, the process of the emergence of a new leftist program seems to reach completion. A fundamentally new set of concepts becomes apparent in three different texts written in the second half of 1976. First it is necessary to mention the first volume of *Main Currents of Marxism* by widely known Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. From a new leftist intellectual perspective, the symbolic significance of his book lies in the fact that the author definitively denounces Marxism, claiming that the great ideology of Marx and Engels is irreversibly dead. In the same year Adam Michnik, another very important figure of the Polish left of this time, writes his *The Church and the Left*. In this book the author makes an effort to overcome a distrust toward religion deeply rooted in the Polish leftist tradition. According to Michnik, progressive circles of Polish Catholic dissidents should become a very important component of Polish anti-communist opposition. Finally, at the very same time, Jacek Kuroń - the author of the third text, *Myśli o programie działania (Thoughts on an Action Program)* and a widely known Polish ex-revisionist - outlines a new strategy of social self-organization. These three paradigmatic texts leave no doubt that in the middle of the 1970s the representatives of the Polish "secular left" - this is a term used in the first sentence of *The Church and the Left* - find themselves very far indeed from the revolutionary ideas included in the famous *Open Letter to the Party* from 1965. The main objective of this presentation is to trace, describe and analyze this astonishing evolution which the left mindset underwent after 1968. It ought to be clearly emphasized that I won't deal with the history of the anti-communist leftist opposition, but with a "movement" of ideas taking place in the discourse of this opposition's representatives. This "movement" - sometimes "fluctuating" and full of "micro-ruptures" and sometimes, conversely, continuous - led ex-revisionists in the end to reject the leftist point of view and in the 1980s, leaving them ready to adopt liberal values. The most important discursive shifts started in the 1970s and were taking place long before the famous breakthrough of 1989. This perspective lets us see some aspects of the recent history of Poland in new light.

Petr Kužel, PhD
Czech Academy of Sciences

The Political Thought of Egon Bondy: Marxist Criticism of Soviet-type Society in Czechoslovakia

This paper deals with the intellectual life and work of Egon Bondy, who was one of the most important thinkers in oppositional circles in Czechoslovakia, and who criticized Soviet-type societies from radical Marxist perspective. This paper follows the development of his political thought as well as his activities in radical movements in the 1960's and in the Czechoslovak underground after 1968. Egon Bondy is best recognized by the wider public as an original poet and writer and as one of the leading figures of the Czechoslovak underground. He is also known as a philosopher devoted to strictly abstract ontological issues. But his political analysis, which represents an important part of his theoretical work, is rarely treated as an object of interest. Due to his reputation as a poet and writer, the most of his writing that has been translated into foreign languages is comprised by novels and poems. In Polish, for example, there exist translations of three of his novels and one collection of poems, but none of his theoretical work. This is why I would like to present, in my contribution, the evolution of his *political* thought, and to place this in the context of critical approaches in Czech Marxism.

Paweł Szelegieniec
Jagiellonian University

The Struggle for Workers' Councils: From The Factory Movement to Bureaucratic Neutralization, 1956-1960 in Poland

The aim of this talk is to present the process of the rise and fall of the workers' council movement in post-Stalinist Poland, from its emergence in October 1956 to the early 1960s, when the ruling bureaucracy finally neutralized the councils through the so-called "Workers' Self-Management Bill" of 1958. The new law successfully incorporated the workers' councils from an institution democratic in its social character into an authoritarian and nomenklatura-type economic system of factory regime. At the beginning, the workers' councils represented the aspirations of the Polish working class in their will to implement democratic control over the labor process and improve factory work organization. However, after the 1958 Bill, the councils became part of a three-part management organ called the "Conference of Workers' Management" (KSR), whose aim was to govern the workplace. The only democratically elected member in the KSR was a member of the workers' council. In the KSR, the representatives of the ruling bureaucratic Stalinist-type party, the PZPR, and Party-controlled factory councils (which were different organizations from workers' councils) had a majority of votes and could "democratically" reject all proposals of the workers' councils.

Katarzyna Bielińska-Kowalewska, PhD
IW „Książka i Prasa”/grad.GSSR

The Anti-Nationalism of Very Young Communists in Poland after WW2

As the philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński wrote in 1956, the new communist regime implemented in Poland after WW2 was for many persons “an exponent of the only organized current which sincerely and decisively opposed anti-Semitism.” Anti-Semitism, tightly and intimately intertwined with Polish nationalism, was the burning question for all progressives since pre-war times. In the forties, after the Holocaust and in the face of the explosion of brutal post-war anti-Semitism, with Poles opposing the return of survivors and murdering them, this question was of extreme importance. The Polish Workers’ Party, however, not only paid tribute to Polish nationalism but also forged a strong alliance with nationalists. This alliance was contested by some then-very-young cadres who were to become the main exponents of Polish Marxist Humanism. Their decisively anti-nationalist stand led to a lasting objective alliance between them and the so-called bourgeois (in reality democratic) intelligentsia, in spite of the crucial role that the same cadres played in the campaign against this intelligentsia in the Stalinist period. This came to political light in the course of de-Stalinization, when these young communists fought together with the democratic, “bourgeois” intellectuals to destroy anti-Semitism, both institutional and grassroots.

Joe Grim Feinberg, PhD
Czech Academy of Sciences

Ivan Sviták’s Surrealist Humanism

In this presentation I will outline Czech philosopher Ivan Sviták’s life and work, and I will discuss the historical context for Sviták’s most salient theoretical contributions. Sviták was a thinker of exceptional breadth, and while his philosophy held to the general outlines of other Marxist humanists of the 1950s and 60s, he was at his most innovative when bringing Marxist humanist ideas into a variety of fields. He delved into familiar humanist topics such as poetry, atheism, and ancient myth, but also into fields less well trod by his intellectual fellow travelers, such as avant-garde film, the history of alchemy, and the meaning of love. What ties together these various interests and enabled Sviták to make an original contribution to Marxist humanist thought, I argue, is Sviták’s interest in surrealism. In a variety of writings, Sviták attempted to work out a synthesis of surrealist intellectual traditions and humanist Marxism. Sviták reinterpreted three classic surrealist terms: “love,” “poetry,” and “revolution,” and this reinterpretation led him, in turn, to propose a new interpretation of the classic humanist category of “the human being”: a “surrealist model of the human.”

Monika Woźniak

University of Warsaw

Adam Schaff in the Eyes of Evald Ilyenkov

In my paper I will discuss Evald Ilyenkov's criticism of Adam Schaff's book, *Marxism and the Human Individual*. One can distinguish two levels of this critique by Ilyenkov, the main representative of so-called "critical" or "creative" Marxism in Soviet Russia. The first level is political and deals mainly with the false depiction of the bureaucracy in Schaff's work. The second is anthropological. The core of Ilyenkov's critique here is the social nature of man, supposedly missed by Schaff in his abstract humanism. It should be stressed that unlike many other Marxists Ilyenkov does not extend his critique to humanism as such. In the essay *Humanism and Science* (published in 1971) he demonstrates that the humanist dimension of Marx's *Capital* is part of the work's core. The main goal of my paper will be to situate Ilyenkov's interpretation of *Marxism and the Human Individual* in the broader context of his thought. I will therefore analyze his understanding of relations between Marxism and humanism (including the problem of violence) with regard to his attitude towards Hegel and his polemic with positivist tendencies in Marxism.



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