

# **Transcript: What is Marxist Humanism and what role did it play in the dissident Central European Marxism of the late 1960s and early 70s**

**Darian:** Hi this is Darian Meacham from UWE Philosophy and I am here again with Dr Francesco Tava from the University of Milan. Hello Francesco.

**Francesco:** Hello again Darian

**Darian:** Francesco one of your areas of expertise is central European dissident Marxism from the 1960s and 70s. Can you maybe explain to us who some of the figures are in that movement but also how the type of Marxism that they developed in that period was distinct from the orthodox Marxism or the Marxism of the Communist party in Czechoslovakia but also in Eastern Europe at the time?

**Francesco:** Yes of course. The idea of Marxist humanism started in the 60s with the task to bring Marxism and Marxist philosophy back to its original field which is western continental philosophy. So we trace all the links, all the bonds between Marxism and Hegel's and idealistic philosophy as well as with other currents of contemporary philosophy like phenomenology, existentialism and so on. There are many different ways in which this Marxist humanism developed, one of them which is very important to me is the one that took place mostly in Czechoslovakia thanks to a philosopher like Karel Kosík who started his efforts in this direction during the 60s. The basic point of this kind of Marxism was the consideration, the reappraisal of man, of the human being as the central character of Marxism itself. In its way it was a very strong contra position against the official ideology which saw man just as a force, just an element of power useful to achieve a determined target according to Kosík it was important on the other way to underline other aspects of the human being like his problems, his most tragic also grotesque elements, like his capacity to laugh for example, his mortality as a fundamental aspect of his life. So the idea was to take back this very human man, this very natural and mortal human being and all his defects as actually the central character of politics.

**Darian:** Can you say something maybe about how this strain or how this development in Marxist philosophy was received by the authorities in Eastern Europe and particularly in Czechoslovakia at the time?

**Francesco:** There was no contact actually, the authorities just denied this kind of development of Marxism. The same idea of using the term, the word man within classic Stalinist Marxism was quite impossible. The man was just seen as the

worker like a total positive and totally evident figure. Just the idea of considering men as a more complex thing would be accused by these authorities of a sort of existentialism which was one of the most common accuses against this kind of thought. In this sense there was a harsh battle between these two fields and Kosík as well as many other philosophers at the time were just banned from universities and they could not publish or teach or do public speeches until the 90s. But also after 1989, and this is also another important aspect they were quite pessimists about the situation because many things they found wrong or problematic during communism they found not in another and not a better way also in capitalism. Their critique I think is still valid today because actually it touches many aspects of contemporary democracy as well.

**Darian:** That's very interesting. Did these Eastern European dissident or Central European dissident Marxists have an impact on the development of Marxism in Western Europe? Or for example on development of existentialist Marxism in thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre or Merleau-Ponty?

**Francesco:** There were many contacts between Eastern Europe and Western Europe in a sense, thanks first of all to the thoughts of Eastern European or the centre of Eastern European intellectuals of course. For example in the 60s there was a very important conference that took place in Germany after the idea of Erich Fromm about this idea of socialist humanism and that was an occasion to confront between the many different positions. And we could also remember the work by the group Praxis where actually these philosophers tried for many years to create this, also there is intonation of aversion journal written in English in order to develop this idea of this praxis which is one of the other very important elements of this Marxist humanism. So yeah these thoughts at present are still waiting to be studied deeply.

**Darian:** Alright that's fantastic, it seems that there's still a lot of work to do in this area

**Francesco:** Apparently, let's hope that we can do it

[Both laugh]

**Darian:** Great thank you very much Francesco

**Francesco:** You're welcome