

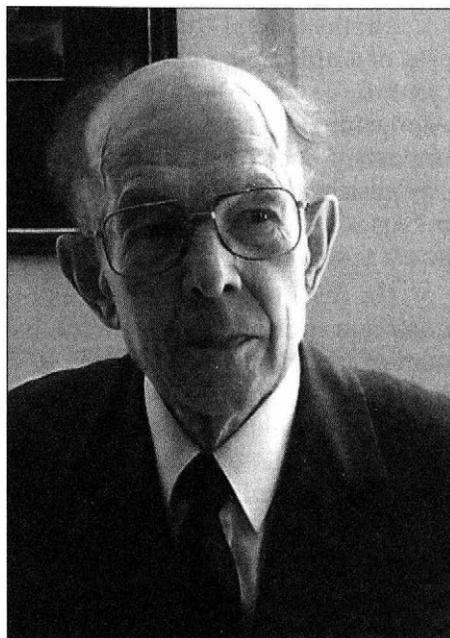
## A Pioneer of the Renewal of Czechoslovak Sociology in the 1960s – Remembering Josef L. Porket

When sociology was allowed again in the former Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s – following a period when it had been labelled a ‘bourgeois pseudo-science’ and was banned from universities and research in 1950 – one of the names to emerge most frequently during the time of its revival was that of Josef L. Porket. Once the door was opened, he intensively began publishing articles in the newly established *Sociologický časopis (Sociological Review)* and elsewhere and reviewed foreign books on the sociology of work and management in technical journals, and he also wrote two pioneering studies on the sociology of work in 1967.

It was a new name for me at the time. But Josef was already forty years old and had long – and negative – experience with the communist regime. After he completed his studies at the Czech Technical University in Prague, taking a degree in economics in 1949, his continuing education was interrupted, as he was considered politically suspect by the state owing to his interest and belief in the free market. He was even arrested and interrogated for four months. Although never charged with anything, he was not allowed to obtain academic work until much later, in research related to ‘rationalisation in the field of construction’.

After 1965, he was allowed to finish his doctoral studies (candidate of sciences according to the Soviet model) and he started to attend conferences, some of them abroad. In 1968, he went to a conference in England, where he met his future wife Barbara, who was the conference secretary. After the Soviet invasion in 1968, he married Barbara in England in January 1969 after a short courtship by post. He emigrated from Czechoslovakia and settled in England in June that year, where he started a new career. He earned his PhD at the London School of Economics in 1973 with the thesis ‘Authority in Communist Czechoslovakia prior to 1968’.

For some years, Josef was associated with St Antony’s College in Oxford and later became an independent research scholar. He focused on the labour market,



Josef Ludvík Porket  
1926–2007

management, and social policy under the communist system. Liberally oriented, he was a long-standing member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, and a member of the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Centre for Research into Post Communist Economies (CRCE). He was also a member of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies. His regular contributions to the review *Economic Affairs* were highly valued.

In the United Kingdom, Josef continued his very intensive work in the large area of employment, the labour market, and social policy in communist and post-communist countries, within a broader focus on comparative economic systems. Alongside dozens of reviews, articles, and conference papers, he also wrote three important books, all published by Macmillan. In 1989, *Work, Employment and Unemployment in the Soviet Union* was published, followed in 1995 by *Unemployment in Capitalist, Communist and Post-Communist Economies* and in 1998 by *Modern Economic Systems and their Transformation*.

In his studies on unemployment, he stressed the inevitability of the phenomenon in modern economies, examined open and hidden unemployment in market and planned economies, and concentrated on the issue of unemployment in post-communist economies between 1989 and 1993. He also tackled economic systems and their transformation, the topic dealt with extensively in his last book. He stressed that economies experience a tension between economic individualism and economic collectivism, which in modern economies revolves around the role of the state in the economy. Since the collapse of communism, this tension has manifested itself not as a tension between market capitalism and command socialism, but as a tension between the free market and the interventionist variants of market capitalism.

After 1989, Josef also began publishing in Czech journals. In the Czech edition of the *Czech Sociological Review*, he published on the 'visible and invisible hand as an inherent tension of modern economies' (2/1997), while in the English edition he wrote about 'the pros and cons of state regulation' (3/2002). In *Political Economy*, he contributed to the debate of whether 'the state is in demise' (6/1998). *Unemployment in Capitalist, Communist and Post-Communist Economies* was reviewed with appreciation by Martin Lux in the Czech edition of the *Czech Sociological Review* (4/1997).

Josef L. Porket was very fortunate in that socio-economic research remained his vocation and his hobby and passion until the day he died. He was a very meticulous person, who liked everything in its exact place in his study. He contributed significantly to the knowledge on communist and post-communist countries with regard to economic and social policies. He behaved as a very private man who didn't talk much about himself. He had kept in touch with friends and relatives in Czechoslovakia over the years and returned to Prague for several visits after the fall of communism in 1989 – including last September for his 80th birthday. He remains in our memories.

Jiří Večerník

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