to politics stems from the existentialist school and is an aspect of politics that deserves far more study.

The Dialectics of Liberation is a truly revolutionary book and is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the roots of revolution in our society. Rarely in the space of two hundred pages will one find such a comprehensive yet penetrating analysis of all aspects of our contemporary sickness and the possibilities for an alternative. My major criticism of the book is that, whereas it lays bare the diseased structure of world society (that is: poses the problem) in a way which few can match, it fails to attempt an outline of a solution I do not mean by this calls to action, immediate programs, etc. (although we could do with some of these, too) but rather an attempt to perceive what social forces are likely to move when and how and where in response to the contradictions whose existence the various authors so ably demonstrate.12

For this is the great problem which the revolution faces, the huge obstacle which blocks the path of the dialectic: although the left’s understanding of society and its ills is not good enough and must be improved, it is still miles ahead of the vast masses of mankind — so far, in fact, that the difference is frightening. How to expand the consciousness of mankind, particularly that part of it in the west, is the key task before us. Praxis is just as crucial an element in the dialectic as theory, and if theory is poverty-stricken, praxis is more so, partly due to the opting out of many who regard themselves as “theorists”. The activists must get some theory and the philosophers must leap out of their defeatist armchairs (even if it is only to a desk to write a good book) for nothing less than the future of man and his planet is at stake. Those who react to this as a mere cliche should read the book.

Finally, to return to my original theme. The Dialectics of Liberation opens up new avenues of thought for revolutionary theory, and at the same time provides a genuine alternative to bourgeois sociology. It is no accident that so many of those who contributed to this critique are themselves social scientists, but social scientists who have sharp differences with many of their colleagues. Only by a full understanding of all the issues, not by off the cuff dismissals, can one develop a revolutionary social science and, hence, make a revolution. There is a bourgeois sociology and books such as this help to expose its inadequacies. Equally, there are those revolutionaries who do not understand and therefore cannot distinguish what is bourgeois and what is not in social science. They are as much a problem in the dialectic of liberation as the “bourgeois” sociologists they pretend to criticise.

BRIAN AARONS


IT IS NOW BECOMING increasingly fashionable amongst members of the Australian New Left to deride “dry, old marxists” whilst making complimentary grunts about the brilliance of such doyens of the Yippie Left as Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffmann. The persons who express such views, as

12 Of all the authors, Gerassi is the only one to raise the need for genuinely revolutionary organisation, free from the Stalinism of the past.
well as being largely unfamiliar with the work of the classical Marxists they so easily dismiss, are also unaware of the important contributions made by more contemporary Marxist scholars. This collection of essays, far from being dry or non-eclectic in the range of subject it discusses, deserves study, not only by the members of the New Left, but by those more of Baran’s generation.

In a country like Australia, where most of the self-styled “Marxists” abrogate the responsibility of such a name-tag to undertake a serious study of economics and economic history — subjects which Marx hardly ignored — Marxist intellectuals like Baran are little read and even less understood. Baran clearly believed that one of the most important advantages of the Marxian approach is its breadth of vision; this is indicated by the inclusion of essays on such differentiated topics as “Marxism and Psycho-Analysis” and “The Commitment of the Intellectual”. Yet he was by training and inclination an economist, and it was his application of a Marxian approach to this discipline that enabled him to make contributions to economics in general and to Marxism in particular.

Writing in the early 1950’s when the problems of economic development were just beginning to again capture the attention of economists, Baran drew attention to the need to consider political and other types of barriers to development when studying the problems of Third World countries. He particularly stressed the need to consider the economic effects of imperialism and neocolonialism on these countries’ development prospects and performances. Now that it is quite fashionable to use Baran type arguments about development, and whilst one should not underplay his contributions in this field, necessary criticism of Baran must be made.

Baran’s discussions of the Soviet Union and China, although sheltered somewhat by the passage of time, are far from impressive. His superficial analysis of the Soviet Union, which results in predictions of continuing liberalization, has been belied by events. His insistence that China is following a similar path towards socialism as that followed by the Soviet Union does not stand up to the facts. The Chinese have not abandoned an attempt to organize a society largely on moral as distinct from material incentives, as Lenin so hastily did; they have not waited until China is industrialized before attempting to decentralize and democratize planning decisions, thereby disproving Baran’s assertion that planning can’t be so modified until after industrialization has been accomplished; and finally, the Chinese are no longer placing major emphasis on capital — intensive techniques of production — they are most sensibly using their greatest resource, labour, in an intensive fashion.

More specific criticisms of technical aspects of some of the essays could be made, but for the non-economist reader it is more important to discuss Baran’s general approach to Marxian economics and his relevance to current debates in the Western and Communist world about economics as a discipline. Baran and others of his genre and generation, for example Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb, while they were not placed by geography in a Stalinist straight-jacket of economic orthodoxy and vehement opposition to the use of mathematics in economics, nevertheless failed to develop significantly the techniques of analysis contained in the Marxian approach. As political economists they tended to concentrate largely on more general problems — though some of Dobb’s later work is an exception — to the detriment of the fulfilment of the utility contained in Marxian economics when applied to more specific problems.
In fact the utilization of hints left by Marx by the more perceptive orthodox economists has done the greatest service to Marxian economics; the majority of Marxist scholars were too unprepared to modify Marx's original structures, even if all the evidence pointed to their incorrectness or unsuitability to more advanced stages of capitalism. Without doubt the best example of this myopic use of Marxian economics was the painful attempt, and a basically fruitless and useless attempt it proved to be, to base Soviet investment policy on the labour theory of value. After decades of ideological wrangling this attempt has for all effective purposes been abandoned, and bourgeois tools are now being applied. One wonders what Marx would have thought of this use of his theory to plan a socialist society when he had used it as a vital theoretical base for his analysis of the development of capitalism. The political economy of socialism has a long way to go before it reaches the sophistication Marx achieved in his analysis of capitalism. It is to Baran's discredit that he did not see the failures of the Soviet economists in particular and confined himself to problems involving Western capitalism and imperialism. Western Marxist scholars had a responsibility towards the Soviet Union, but most, including Baran, preferred to follow Stalinist orthodoxy or were blinded ideologically by it. Marxian economics, as well as Soviet economic development, were restricted by these pressures.

It is also important to relate Baran's work with the growing controversies about the scope of economics courses in Western universities; these debates have now begun in some of the Australian universities and, unfortunately, have got off to a bad start. Like Stalin, many radical critics of economics are violently opposed to mathematical techniques in economics and want them removed from economics courses. But Marx realized the value of such techniques and felt strongly his inadequacies in this area. To be an effective critic of orthodox economics one has to be able to understand fully the work of such economists. Baran, in one of these essays stresses that mathematics does have a function, and the radical critics should not only take up some of his attacks on orthodox economics — and there is no sign yet in Australia of classical Marxist attacks being launched — but must also not fall into the anti-intellectual position of being anti all mathematics as such. When the demand amongst even the US radical critics is for economics to revert to a crude form of positivism, Baran has still much to offer to these debates.

Moreover, if one is to understand the latest developments in the socialist countries one also has to have a basic understanding of mathematics. Castro, realizing that the Soviet economists had little to offer, recently issued an invitation to a top Harvard professor to draw up a plan for the development of the entire Isle of Pines. Interesting work is also commencing in the US, which involves using econometric techniques to study poverty and depressed groups. Marxists must not oppose mathematical techniques in economics, even if by doing so this appears the easiest way to get mass support. In sum, Baran type critiques must be made but the attack on orthodox economics must not stop there. Baran and others like him are of little value if you wish to become a constructive critic of bourgeois economics; their only value is to point you in the right direction. Marx was only such a brilliant critic of classical political economy because he made such a tremendous effort to firstly master it. His approach must also be applied to attacking the orthodoxy of our time.

How does this collection of essays by a "dry, old Marxist" compare with
the analytical works of the father of the Yippies, Jerry Rubin, which are now being so widely read by most sections of the Left? When one attempts such a comparison, one is left feeling very despondent about the future of the Western Left if Rubin and his cohorts are to continue to dominate. At least the Marxists had an idea of what they were fighting, although it tended to be a crude and vulgar understanding of contemporary capitalism. Rubin obviously has no real idea of his enemy’s structure and hence his strategies remain Yippie yells and TV appearances.

Baran, unlike many of the heroes of the New Left was able to rise above the crassness and anti-intellectualism of his society, and thus his example remains an important one. Reading these essays one is also reminded of the absence of persons of the intellectual calibre of Baran within the Australian Left. The current obsession with the younger and the circumventing of Marx’s more important contributions in the field of political economy, has reduced interest in the type of work Baran did. These essays, despite their limitations, are at least in the broad Marxian tradition of directing attention to the importance of economic factors. The study of the so-called “counter-culture” and other sometimes vague aspects of contemporary capitalism, whilst of undeniable value, must not misdirect attention away from the areas in which Baran spent so much of his life-time and which remain so crucial if one is to comprehend the dynamics of monopoly capitalism.

Dave Clark

A NEW BRITANNIA, by Humphrey McQueen.
Penguin, 261pp., $1.50.

Heinemann, 304pp., $1.75.

"THE PAST BELONGS TO THE ENEMY" according to Humphrey McQueen, and if the intellectual and emotional maturity of the two books under review were in any way representative of the Australian Left, so would the future. But, of course they are not representative. The book on the New Left should have been sub-titled "Studies from a Dying Sub-Culture". One is not exactly surprised to find that most of the contributors have changed their views a good deal since they composed their pieces. McQueen has not — he reproduces his peroration in the New Left collection almost word for word in the Penguin. He must have thought it was pretty good. And so it was, if you did not already know what the real temper and value systems of the average Australian were last century. There were several ways of knowing this. One was by being reasonably au fait with the Australian working class, which has changed very little in the last seventy years. Another was by possessing a passing acquaintance with research done as long ago as ten years before the appearance of this miscellany of other people’s labours.

The author in a way prepared us for all of this by saying (p.11) "There is hardly any original research here". However, he goes on to add: "there are a host of new facts". There is nothing of the kind. There are very few new facts indeed. Most of the new interpretations which McQueen defines as a species of fact — and on which he bases the coherent parts of his anti-lower class diatribe