Struggle for the North by J. H. Kelly is one of the most extraordinary books to be published in Australia in recent years. Not only is it a mine of information—a complete inventory of the human, mineral, cattle and water resources of defined remote regions of Northern Australia—but it provides a comprehensive critique of all aspects of government policy toward Northern development since Federation. It also outlines (from a left-Socialist viewpoint) an alternative, detailed strategy for the economic development of the North.

Kelly, emphasising integrated development and the long view of the national interest, effectively answers critics of northern development, including those informed ones who approach the matter on too narrow a basis.

It is instructive, for example, to read 'Struggle for the North' alongside Dr. Davidson's 'The Northern Myth' since Kelly paints on a much wider canvas.

A marxist programme for rural industries and mineral development cannot be "plucked out of the air" or deduced from a series of abstract principles; if it is to be realistic, effective and attainable it must be solidly based on factual information: resource surveys, economic calculation and other "inductive" work. For this reason alone the Australian labor movement in general, and its marxist wing in particular, will gratefully draw on the analysis of Mr. Kelly, who, during seventeen years as a project-evaluation officer with the Commonwealth Bureau of Agricultural Economics, was able to complete a personal survey of every cattle station and every river system of the remote North.

The main conclusions from Kelly's analysis are:

- Private enterprise in the North (the big overseas pastoral companies such as Vestey's, Bovril etc.) has failed—being unable to bring the beef cattle industry of the remote regions up to its potential of 5.1 million head. The industry stagnates at 3 million head.

- The recommendations of a Chifley government sub-committee of Cabinet for a firm policy of limiting future pastoral leases was sabotaged. Instead, the bulk of the cattle lands of the North, previously handed over to the London-based Vestey meat empire and others, due to revert to the Commonwealth in 1965 through expiry of leases, was again handed over: in that year leases were extended from 1954 to 2004.

- The big overseas pastoral companies have always opposed railway construction as likely to lead to the splitting up of their large, inefficiently operated estates. With friendly Conservative governments and Labor governments incapable of placing the co-ordinated transport needs of the North within the framework of an economic development plan they have had their way. Hence the appearance of a piecemeal and emasculated beef-roads scheme—the result of political pressures.

- The backwardness of the beef cattle industry has been due to the maladministration of the public estate, erosion caused by carelessness, and the use of an
inefficient "open range" system of grazing. All of this amounts to what former Northern Territory Administrator Wise and Kelly call the "rape of the land".

- Absentee landholders oppose the kind of hydrological investigation needed to assess the irrigation possibilities of the remote North, since it would threaten their hold on vast leaseholds.

- The Commonwealth government has neglected aborigine welfare for decades, failing to prosecute cattle owners for underpayment of aborigine stockmen. By contrast, conservative federal governments have never been backward in legislating in favour of wealthy absentee landholders of the Northern Territory, often at heavy cost to the Australian taxpayers.

- The cattle industry of the remote North is dependent on aborigines as the major labour force for the operation of the industry. Moreover, the source of the most frequent complaints about aborigine workers is the large absentee holders: yet it is their stations which flagrantly ignore the standards for aborigine accommodation set out in the N.T. Wards Employment Ordinance of 1959, and which reward their aborigine workers with the bare minimum payable under N.T. legislation.

- An Act of the Commonwealth Parliament should be immediately passed to enforce measures to reconstruct the cattle industry in the N.T. It should ensure that graziers and farmers as custodians of the public estate should be punished for neglect and for refusing to conform to prescribed instructions on soil, vegetation and water resources, and on animal husbandry, fencing, the dipping of cattle etc.

- For an equivalent investment (as compared with the Ord River Irrigation Project) in a reconstituted cattle industry run by resident holders carrying an average of 7,000 head, Australia would generate more value of output, foreign exchange and employment for closer settlement of remote northern regions than the Ord Scheme.

- Rents and royalties paid by overseas corporations in the North are paltry. They are arbitrary, and levied at a level brought about by political threats and pressures from these corporations, rather than at a level to bring about an efficient structure of production and to yield some return on public monies spent on ports, railways etc. Moreover, decisions about Northern mineral development are increasingly taken by a head-office in London or New York as part of a world strategy of geo-politics, rather than in accordance with the needs of the Australian people.

- A Northern Australia Commission was bitterly opposed by Vesteyes, but is essential as part of "planning machinery" for Northern development—provided it has a positive charter and is backed by statutory powers and adequate finance.

- Trade Unions must be brought into any Plan for the North sooner or later and "for full co-operation it should be sooner rather than later".

- Northern development should not be advocated for its own sake or for emotional reasons (such as the fear of "Asian hordes"). It must be part of a blueprint for the re-organisation of the economy. The present utilisation of resources in the North is inefficient and wasteful and will remain so until a socialist government takes a leading part in their re-organisation and development.

Mr. Kelly's work on minerals serves as a basis for developing
a two-pronged attack on the activities of the large mining companies themselves and on their manipulation of the Australian economy.

Trade unionists and socialists reacted sharply to the "tough" line on wages and conditions pursued by Mt. Isa Mines Ltd. last year and by Conzinc Rio Tinto this year. With plenty of overseas-capital backing and alternative mineral deposits under their control in South America and elsewhere these international giants can afford to adopt a "take it or leave it" attitude to workers—and even to local capitalists and the Australian government.

More significant, they are seeking to penetrate and establish a powerful niche in what has come to be called "permanent defence industries" (The Australian 26-2-66). As a lead-up to permanent war industry, the Menzies Government established a group of "defence advisory committees" in the 1950s, integrated with the Commonwealth Department of Supply. These committees are made up of departmental officials and the highest representatives of big-business and cover: ammunition, explosives and chemicals, leathergoods, military vehicles, weapons and their equipment, electrical goods, radar and communications, machine tools, gauges and factory equipment and materials industry. (Hansard, 28/4/63, p. 996). The all-important Materials Industry Advisory Committee is composed of Messrs. A. Simmons and I. R. Angus (Department of Supply), R. G. Parry-Okeden (Chairman of Directors, Lysaghts), M. B. Somerset (Managing Director, Associated Pulp and Paper Mills), J. A. Bult (General Manager, Electrolytic Zinc), J. D. Norgard (General Manager of Operations B.H.P. Victoria), K. A. Cameron (Chairman, Mount Morgan Ltd.), G. R. Fisher (Chairman Mt. Isa Mines Ltd.) and Sir Maurice Mawby (Chairman, Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd.).

The last four of these represent companies specifically criticised in Kelly's book for their tactics in obtaining ownership of Australian minerals for laughably-low royalties and for other activities. Yet it is clear (as John Allison, former member of one of these "Defence Advisory Committees") boasted during the Queale Memorial Lecture in Adelaide a few years ago, that these committees exert a tremendous influence on government policy—an influence that democrats and Australian socialists ought to counter by exposing them.

On the wider issue of foreign investment, Mr. Kelly points out in Chapter 9, that much of the propaganda about the net capital and productivity gains from it is without foundation. He mentions how General Motors Holden gained control over the motor vehicle industry with an initial capital grant from the Chifley government. Less than 2 million American dollars was advanced but from this an asset of more than $600m was built up here out of profits by 1963, and in the same period $A140m was dispatched to the U.S. in dividends. A high price was paid for the use of the name "General Motors". Not only was the price high in terms of the charge made for the final product, but there were indirect costs to Australia involved in the substantial excess capacity and over-investment in the industry, as well as limitations (franchises) on the export of Australian cars. Tariff protection given to industries such as motor vehicles, to attract foreign capital here, causes an attraction of Australian labour and capital to those industries and raises their prices.

Mr. Kelly points out that this process will squeeze profits and incomes in rural industries and
leads to a reduced capital inflow into other profitable industries such as the beef cattle industry. He suggests that the empire-building process pioneered by G.M.H. will be repeated in the “giveaways” on the mineral front. A government investment of 2 million dollars in the motor vehicle industry and of public monies in minerals would lead, on the other hand, to a large return to the government instead of to foreign investors.

The data presented on the cattle industry underlines the need for a new and more comprehensive marxist programme for rural industries. Kelly’s program, a left-socialist one, involves resumption of lands and their return to public control. His “efficient productive units” in the cattle industry involves resident ownership by a relatively small number of people. A marxist programme would go beyond this. It is likely to envisage the co-existence of cooperatively owned (by aborigines) cattle stations and a network of publicly-owned cattle enterprises managed by a few hundred talented managers. A system needs to be worked out under which these professionals would administer the public estate in the North, allowing them to share in returns (and have the incentive to perform efficiently) while serving the needs of the economy and the people. It must be said, however, that Kelly’s short-term programme poses a challenge for socialists in Australia—the elaboration of a detailed and soundly-based long-term rural programme.

This attractively produced book—with a dozen completely new maps and numerous photographs to supplement the analytical content—is a must for the general reader, trade unionists and all thoughtful socialists.

—Robert Kirk.

“THE KING BETWEEN”
— David Martin. Cassell, $2.85.

IN the mythical kingdom of Lhaodia, ageing King Anabol walks a dangerous tight-rope. On his eastern borders the Americans have amassed a great military arsenal; to his north are the Chinese, from whom the ancient oracles of the Pure Doctrine have foreshadowed death and disaster for Lhaodia. So Anabol embarks on a struggle for neutrality. His weapons — his great dream of a Freedom Road across Lhaodia and the need for surgical attention to his prostate gland. To whom will he entrust the building of the road, and the operation? On the answer to this question will depend the independence of his tiny realm.

The topicality of this theme in today’s South East Asia is perhaps the most outstanding feature of David Martin’s “The King Between”. Against the skilful play and counterplay of diplomatic intrigue move the characters whom history has flung together—U.S. Ambassador Kiest and his wife Marley, whose liking and respect for Chinese Ambassador Teng make her suspect in Washington; beautiful Didon, Anabol’s French wife; Howard Johanson, American Intelligence “hard-liner”; little Prince Sua, 12-year-old heir to the throne, caught bewilderingly between the modern West and ancient East; the scholarly and sinister mystic Trukpetch Surivongse.

Mounting tension over the development of the Freedom Road provides political background for the explosive potential of human relationships. As pressure is put on the little kingdom by “hard-liners” from both sides, as an-
cient superstitions and the casting of a horoscope may decide the fate of a nation and of world peace, the tentative relationship between General Teng and Marley Kiest flickers with a promise of more hopeful solutions for mankind. But as the unexpected denouement approaches with gathering speed, it is inevitable that such people are going to provide the sacrificial offerings to the power-hungry. As General Teng put it: "It is hard to grow roses on barbed wire."

David Martin reveals a most intimate knowledge of Asian customs and has woven them into the fabric of his story with an attention to detail which is sometimes overwhelming. The meeting of East and West in tiny Lhaodia unleashes violent passions and violent situations, and perhaps it is right that one should feel despair as long as "hard-liners" in East and West determine policy.

It is a tribute to the author, however, that one just escapes a feeling of defeatism in the final irony. Perhaps this is because of the absurdity of the little king's gland difficulties anyway; perhaps because there is a tongue-in-cheek lightness in handling the pawn-like manoeuvres on the giant chessboard. At any rate, one feels it may be hard, but not impossible, to grow roses on barbed wire one day.

—Duike Mortier.


In this important work Mr. Rowley gives this warning:

"History may judge Australia in New Guinea for what it failed to do rather than for the good work it did.

"Australia's time in the Territory is rapidly running out. Have we sufficient resources, finance, imagination to help New Guinea on the firm road to nationhood? . . . Can we go on improving the future of a complex, still primitive territory as though it was a smooth running branch of the Public Service?"

Since the book appeared, challenges to land alienation, the demand for a real living wage, the conflict over mining royalties, the indications of the emergence of an opposition in the House of Assembly, and an increasing insistence that all decisions affecting New Guinea, including its relations with its neighbors, be referred to the House, all emphasise Mr. Rowley's main point that "it's later than we think."

Mr. Rowley's academic experience fits him to deal with the problems analysed in this work. He is a Master of Arts with wide experience in adult education.

He was principal of the Australian School of Pacific Administration for 14 years. He served with U.N.E.S.C.O. as an expert in Adult and Workers Education in Slam, Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia.

Surveying the world movement of anti-colonialism, Mr. Rowley concludes that the Federal Government should now be making firm decisions about when and how it is to give independence to the peoples of New Guinea who comprise one-sixth of those owing allegiance to the Australian Commonwealth. To delay granting independence until we ourselves are ready could have serious consequences.

The title is carefully chosen as, before the European landfall in the 80's of last century, there was no urban development at all. New Guinea's two million lived in isolation in more than 10,000 villages.

A large portion of the book deals with native society and its development in contact with the white administration.

Mr. Rowley draws attention to the diversity of physical types. Some are tall and slim, others are very short and squat with the great chests and legs of those used to running up and down steep slopes. Skin color, too, is in endless variety, from light brown, "he rich black of the Buka."

Language differentiation is great, but modern studies seem to indicate that they originally stemmed from only a few languages. He quotes Dr. Wurm as stating that the time span for this differentiation could be 3,000 to 4,000 years.

Mr. Rowley trenchantly analyses the system of contract or indentured labor. He says it is saved from the brand of slavery by the fiction of the contract which in most cases is not understood by the indigenous party to the contract.

Mr. Rowley's account of racial discrimination, how it arises and is maintained, is an important portrayal of this feature of colonial life.

He shows how it operates and developed. How so many whites are not conscious of the attitudes which infuriate the New Guineans. He states that there is a widespread belief in the necessity for "white supremacy" in New Guinea. This is deeply resented by the New Guineans.

The author deals with the impact of Australian law which is not understood and because of this there is only token acceptance of the law.

The book has a long and informative chapter on the history and development of Christian religions.

The author says that missions have had some great successes in some areas but the strongly-held views of the people are tending to change Christianity. This is particularly evident in Manus.

The chapter "Villagers React" deals with the various resistances referred to by the whites as Cargo Cults—which arose from the attempt of the people to draw into action the spirits of their ancestors to try and end what they saw as intolerable oppression.

The author's view is that the establishment of local government councils, which give New Guineans some say in their own affairs, with their wider participation in the emerging social order, would tend to push the old magico-religious activities into the background.

Urban development and the emergent working-class is covered in the chapter "Villagers in Town". The development of the industrial worker is sympathetically dealt with as are the problems of the workers in their struggle for better housing, better working conditions and their efforts to lift their pathetically low wage rates.

Mr. Rowley's view is that power is still firmly in the hands of the Administration whose district apparatus has very extensive powers behind the democratic facade of the elected House of Assembly.

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This arrogation of power to the hands of the colonial power is, in his view, contrary to the trends
of world opinion and is fraught with serious consequences. As the author puts it: "A riot in the streets of the capital of Port Moresby might well prove more politically significant for the Territory and Australia than resolutions in the House."

This analysis by a competent observer is probably the most important work of its kind.

In a field where so many writers seem to approach the question of criticism of the administration with fear and trembling, Mr. Rowley forthrightly criticises the whole approach to the New Guinea people by the administration and by the Europeans as individuals.

The book is a product of deep study of the problems created by the impact of modern European civilisation and its form of society on the primitive culture of the New Guineans, a society which has been in existence for probably 4,000 years.

Mr. Rowley is not a socialist, but his love of humanity and his demand for a "fair go" runs like a red thread through his work.

—Jim Cooper


When "civilised" man interferes with Nature he is in trouble. Through need or greed, he hacks down the forests, affects the climate, denudes slopes, erodes and exhausts the soil, slits and pollutes rivers, wipes out living creatures including indigenous peoples, and generally plays merry hell with nature's checks and balances and his own sources of subsistence.

"The Great Extermination" is a grim story of reckless exploitation of Australia's natural resources, animal, plant and soil, and a warning of the implications for present and future generations, written by a number of scientists, experts in their own field, its editor and contributor A. J. ("Jock") Marshall, Professor of Zoology and Comparative Physiology at Monash University.

The book should shock into protest and action even the complacent who rest on the illusion that the natural resources of our continent are as boundless as its horizons.

Professor Marshall well says that parts of the story "may make you sick and despairing of your fellow men". (One might say, rather, "despairing" of capitalist society.)

So modern Australian man is the villain of this piece; man the enemy of his own future, and the evidence presented is convincing enough, although, again, some will prefer differentiation, to put in a plea for the common man, the "little man" who is after all part and product of the society he lives in.

If he is wanton and often brutal in his greed and races after the "quick quid", he is only in step with his governors and the master class who play the tune, and, in the long run he pays the piper in ruined farms and elimination of his sources of livelihood, as the text amply illustrates.

From early days of settlement pleads, warnings and endeavors by the few concerned at the increasing misuse and decimation of our natural resources come to a dead stop against the barriers of greed, political intrigue and corruption, the plain dumb-headedness of governments, and ruthlessness of business interests they represent and an uninformed public.

In his contribution, each scientist illustrates the effects of man's cupidity upon the particular subject of research—animal or bird, reptile or fish,
rivers and streams, forest and plain.

Some blame the sheepmen who eroded the soil through overstocking; others blame vote-seeking politicians who closed their eyes to the slaughter of native fauna; or bureaucrats who permitted the butchery of our forests.

The author’s treatment of the extermination of our resources is mainly historical and there is little reference to the immediate problem of the men with a long-range “covetous eye” (and already firm grip) on vast acreages of land for pastoral and mineral exploitation.

Monopoly is not noted for its concern for conservation or posterity, and in view of modern techniques for rip and tear the prospect of its activities is horrifying unless scientists and honest administrators, backed by an informed working class, can intervene in time.

The most notable omission from the book, however, is the “greatest” extermination in our entire history. Aborigines receive scant mention, or recognition that they were and remain the most valuable, if least valued, of all Australian “resources”.

Physical extermination of the Aboriginal people by bullet, poison and direct starvation may have ceased, but extermination of their identity and culture proceeds apace.

The omission is curious since the standpoint of the book is basically humanist in its concern for man’s education and regeneration into understanding of his relationships with nature.

Yet, where we may lose much knowledge, culture and material value through the disappearance of rare animals and plants, we lose much more in the passing not only of ancient arts and skills but of a way of life, of collective living and alliance with nature. We lose most in forgetting the human relationships of all human beings.

“The Great Exterminator” is not all gloom and disaster in spite of its sub-title.

As well as its evolutionary lessons and the liveliness and wit of much of the writings, there are fascinating accounts of the history and habits of our unique fauna. So much can be learned of the relationship and interdependence of all living organisms, from micro-organisms to man, with each other and with the terrain that both sustains and is sustained by them, that some such sub-title as “First Steps in Ecology... Some lessons in Dialectics” could be justified.

Gleams of hope for a balanced, scientific development of what we have, and reclamation of what can be salvaged glimmer through the whole unhappy tale.

There are indications of some governments’ awareness of and response to the writing on the wall; some attempts here and there to protect flora and fauna and of rational land use; some reservations of large acreages as sanctuaries and national parks, some reafforestation, and a reflection of some public awakening in the development of conservation societies and a national Australian Conservation Foundation.

People become conservation-minded from many motives; love of wild life and trees, from aesthetic or tourism considerations. Even the “bleeding hearts” that irritate Professor Marshall can be part of the general stream that can achieve true conservation and development of our national heritage.

Professor Marshall concludes: “The future of our land lies with you.”

—Joyce Tattersell,