THE LENIN CENTENARY. It must seem strange to those on the left who have been brought up in the tradition of that body of dogma which became known as “Marxism-Leninism” to realise that Lenin knew nothing about “Marxism-Leninism”. Even the concept of “Leninism” was unknown to him.

That did not restrict the range of his vision. On the contrary it saved him from being squeezed into a fixed and rigid pattern of thought. A serious reading of Lenin reveals a man vastly different from that slanted picture of Lenin which has been handed down through Stalin’s Foundations of Leninism and the Stalin edited Short History of the C.P.S.U. (B) — both the intellectual food of a whole generation of communists. It is that which many understand by “Leninism”.
The real Lenin, as distinct from that of the Stalin mythology, was a man of many facets. He was not afraid to change his views, to adapt himself to new circumstances, to retrace his steps, to admit mistakes—he claimed to have made thousands of mistakes—but also to fight hard for his point of view when he was convinced that he was right. He was the leader of the party that regarded the most open debate and free contest of ideas as normal and essential for a revolutionary party. When the pressure for survival of the revolution in an incredibly backward country, in isolation and beset by the biggest imperialist marauders led to a reduction of this freedom, Lenin immediately looked for counteracting measures.

The last period of his life was one of worry for the future of the revolution in Russia, fear that the backwardness would overwhelm the successful revolution, that bureaucracy would come to dominate. The new apparatus, he claimed, was one which "we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch, only slightly repainted on the surface". Even if it were true that he saw some of these dangers too late, he saw them earlier than others.

Contrary to the prevailing myths, there is not one but many Lenins, an everchanging even contradictory Lenin. He argued against those Bolsheviks who would not see beyond "the formulas of yesterday". He held that: "... a Marxist must take cognizance of actual events, of the precise facts of reality, and must not cling to past theory, which like all theories at best only outlines the main and the general and only approximates to an inclusive grasp of the complexities of living reality.

"Theory, my friend, is grey, but green is the eternal tree of life. "... they (Marx and Engels) ridiculed and rightly ridiculed the learning and repetition by rote of 'formulas' which, at best, are capable of giving only an outline of general tasks that are necessarily liable to be modified by the concrete economic and political conditions of each particular phase of the historical process". (Vol. 6 Selected Works.)

In the current controversies between the "new" left and the "old" left, Lenin, one feels, would have seen much that is positive in the "new" left. If the distinction is between simple propaganda and action Lenin must be regarded as strictly "new" left. He believed in action and acted to lead the Russian revolution against the advice of some of his collaborators who had become overcautious, set in established patterns — "old" left, perhaps.

The man who said that "Anarchism is not infrequently a kind
of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working class move­
ment”, would have battled to eliminate the sins of the “old” left of today.

It is not without significance that some of the most serious group­
ings in the “new” left are groping towards the Leninist concept of an organised party, not necessarily that outlined in What is to be Done?, of a party operating in conditions of illegality and lack of political rights, but nevertheless to a Leninist type of party, in the sense of an organised detachment.

Experience is pushing some in the “new” left to the conclusion that in a modern capitalist state, where the problem for revolutionaries is not simply one of assault on the centre of power as it was in Russia, the need for a strong party with political experience, with a Marxist culture, with prestige among the people, is greater than ever if it is to ensure the triumph of its ideals and aims.

It is a pity that the volume of noise of some of the current celebrations tend to drown the most relevant elements of the Leninist tradition.

B. T.

A PRELIMINARY REPORT: The conference* on Yugoslav workers’ self-management held in Amsterdam in January was a washout: it revealed both the futility of the workers meeting in such conferences and what is wrong with the European labor movement. Invitations were directed not only to students and academics but to trade unions and to members of the working class who wished to attend. Perhaps I am naive but I had visions of a cross between the scene at the Winter Palace and the Trades Hall pub, and an earnest attempt by westerners and specially western socialists to learn something in worker self-management. I certainly expected there to be a representative group of workers there, as it was the problems of workers’ self-management which was being discussed.

I have attended the meetings of Australian working class parties: I have boozed at the meeting places of socialist intellectuals and

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* Alastair Davidson, a member of the Editorial Board of A.L.R, now on sabbatical leave in Italy, attended this Conference on behalf of A.L.R, and with the support of a number of trade unions.
socialist and other workers: I have visited the homes of the bureaucracy of our parties and unions: in all cases I was in a democratic ambient. The party meetings included workers, the booze ups were in the beer gardens of pubs, and the houses were modest dwellings suited to the leaders of the working class. All bore evidence of the necessity for some common culture which could provide a bridge between groups whose daily occupations were so different that there was danger that they would lose touch with one another. All were evidence of a genuine feeling of egalitarianism rooted in the emotions rather than in any cerebral commitment to the workers’ cause.

But what did I find in Amsterdam? Long before I left I expressed surprise at the cost of registration; which was $45. My surprise was even greater when on reaching Amsterdam I discovered that all had been billeted in the Park Hotel which is a sort of Amsterdam Hilton, where you don’t dare breathe for fear that it might cost you money. I was now quite sure that no fair-dinkum workers would be attending the conference. More of the flavour of the conference could be gathered by the perfect tailoring of the academic gentlemen in attendance; including the Yugoslavs. There was the usual European chaos getting the conference organised and then we were on our way.

It was clear from the outset that there were too many in attendance. The organisers said to me that it was because of the large numbers of student leftists who had wished to come in at the last moment and who (apologetically) could not be excluded. Of course nobody who wished to attend should have been excluded but this was not the real reason for the overcrowding. The real reason was the presence of hordes of well-tailored gentlemen who did not look like workers or even trade union leaders to me, who sat with a conferential air (a compound of too much good food, boredom with the proceedings and half thoughts about how to make that pretty girl over there). These gentlemen, who constituted by far the largest group at the conference, turned out to be representatives of employers’ federations and state authorities. The conference, far from being run on the lines of self-management was run on traditional lines by a sort of professional compere who acted as chairman. This gentleman was very proficient in English but he suffered from a tendency of compères to ingratiate which boded ill for a democratic discussion from the floor. Besides him at the high table were the Yugoslav experts and their respondents, including, a number of names well-known in the English academic world and one reformist Dutch trade unionist who actually wrote the best reply.
The Yugoslav speakers themselves contributed to making the discussion valueless by refusing to generalise from their Yugoslav particulars or to discuss the fundamental problems of where power lay. This allowed the respondents and a select few from the floor to score debating point after debating point against them. It was clear too that many of the Western experts wished to turn the conference into a sort of *Problems of Communism* debate in which sly innuendo mixed with Cold Warriorship to the general detriment of socialism. Professor Peter Wiles was particularly inconsiderate in this manner. The rhetorical questions allowed no replies from the Yugoslavs who clearly regarded much of the proceedings as an exercise in propaganda. Whenever some brave spirit attempted to shift the discussion from "whether the agricultural problem in Slovenia was being coped with adequately", or some such esoterica to the possibility of applying some Yugoslav lessons in the West, the chairman jumped in obediently and ruled it out of order. All fruitful avenues for discussion were closed almost as soon as they were opened.

By the second day it had become clear that a sort of "old boys club" had started operating. The Yugoslav speaker would speak at length and then, the compere would say: "Now Professor Wiles might care to reply", and "Now Mr. Hugenberg", and so on. This effectively limited conversation to those sitting at the high table. Only a few members of the audience were allowed to speak, and they too passed the ball around from one ILO official to another and to a number of employers' representatives. And did the labor aristocracy and the employers' representatives hob-nob together!! If ever I was caught in a conversation with them, I almost always got them wrong, mistaking the employers' representative for the labor leader or vice-versa.

Speakers who got a particularly good speaking time included the Radio Free Europe Man, some Yankee sociologists and senior ILO officials. The expressions on Yugoslav faces were more and more those of repressed anger and misery. One was a fool and as if to ingratiate, informed us that the electrical power complex of which he was in charge had trouble with its workers too, and that it regularly hired the Mackenzie corporation of the US as its management consultants. The already restless student contingent howled the house down at this: evidently they did not feel that they were getting their $45 worth.

On the afternoon of the second day, they finally expressed a class contempt for the proceedings by bursting through the doors in dozens, throwing smoke-bombs and leaflets and demanding the
floor. The organisers stupidly tried to bundle them out — starting a free fight at the entrances, and finally granted them the floor. The students, whatever their origin, now asked a number of pertinent questions:

Why were there no workers in attendance? Was it because the fees had been made so high they were prohibitive? Why was no democratic discussion being allowed? Why was the discussion being kept so narrow and technical that it was worthless?

Finally they asked that as workers they be admitted and that a vote be taken to see if the discussion should proceed on the grounds that they thought fruitful.

You have one guess at the response (the free fight had now stopped and they were in)! Yes, the chairman said that they were out of order, that he refused to listen to them, that no vote could be taken because there was no legitimate motion before the chair. At this he adjourned it all for afternoon tea (afternoon teas can be very effective gags — they were applied to me six times). The audience given its composition was on the whole hostile to the student intrusion and started the usual questions about when the students had last worked, etc.

Afternoon tea did not work this time, however, as after it a motion was put by a Belgian Free University lecturer that they be admitted, and although no vote was taken, they were in effect in. Now began the evidence of reaction’s power to gag dissidents. First, they were asked not to disrupt the meeting and to observe majority wishes that the discussion continue on the lines that it had been. If they were democrats they would do this. They would keep their personal questions for a later time. The students were hoist by their own petard and chose either to leave, have the microphone futilely every fifth or so time, or sit quiet and listen to the conferential bilge which was being handed about. They were too few to outnumber the audience.

So the conference wended its weary and sodden way forward until, thank God, it stopped. It had helped to explain one thing to me: why the European labor movement is so suspicious of elitist theories of the intellectual’s role in the labor movement, like those of Marcuse and Gramsci. Here it is really a necessity for the workers to be on guard against their own intellectuals. This conference was supposed to be one of socialist intellectuals, and the organiser certainly posed as one; so much so that he did not wish to be called “Dr.” as the mayor’s representative at the Municipal reception pointed out. Yet this same gentleman had
his tie torn off by the students who clearly recognised in him an old enemy. He did not want his nice conference to be disturbed by a pack of bearded louts. Rather it was intended to be a gathering of gentlemen, who clearly foregathered at similar conferences frequently, to discuss without the stench of sweat and hard toil, the problems of those who labor. Almost like observing a menagerie. Again and again a feeling of superiority could be detected. Everybody’s theories of elites could be perceived in action here and socialists and workers are clearly right to be suspicious of such gangs of European parlour-pinks. Hegemony is doubly effective if it is instilled by those supposedly representing the workers.

A. D.

THOUGHTS ON THE COOK BI-CENTENARY. By the time this issue appears the official celebrations to mark the two hundredth anniversary of Captain Cook’s discovery of the Australian east coast will be under way. The most prominent members of the royal family are travelling from England to Botany Bay to Townsville in a sort of honorific parody of Cook’s voyages; the NSW government is giving away some $60,000 in a commemorative literary competition (and it will be interesting to see who gets the prizes); stamps and coins bearing the likeness of the redoubtable James Cook are being issued; Canberra is getting a new fountain; Queensland a new university. What’s in it for everyone else?

One of the most interesting suggestions so far has been Kath Walker’s: two hundred Aborigines, dressed in black or wearing black armbands, should attend the official party at all its public functions, drawing silent attention to the plight of the Aboriginal people as a whole.

It is indeed a singularly appropriate occasion for such a vigil. It was the arrival of Cook, and of the European civilisation following him, which spelt almost total disaster for the native Australians; a “fatal impact” from which they have never recovered; from which, in fact, they have never been given a chance to recover. The mandate given to the Australian government by the referendum on Aborigines and the census in 1967 has not been acted upon.—At the time of the recent NSW referendum on Sunday hotel trading it was rumoured that the government, anticipating a “yes” majority, had already drafted legislation to be put before parliament. Clearly
the federal government not only had no such legislation concerning the Aborigines in mind, but in the two and a half years since the referendum it has failed to introduce any legislation concerning the Aborigines whatever. It seems to have weathered even the concerted campaign for land-rights for the Gurindji people at its height twelve months ago. For it to be constantly reminded of these still unrequited claims by the Aborigines themselves seems not merely a just interruption of all the back-slapping and self-congratulations, but a necessary one. Indeed, against this background of repression, only one Aborigine for each year of European domination seems almost a token gesture. I hope that many more will be there to provide support.

Not only is it singularly appropriate that Aboriginal demonstrations should accompany the Cook celebrations; but the situation is also replete with bitter ironies. Cook himself was well aware of the nature of the people into whose lives he had so abruptly intruded. "They may appear to some", he wrote in 1770, "to be the most wretched people on earth but in reality they are far happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but with the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition." The understanding (almost envy) of Cook's insights should be allowed to stand as an indictment of all that the coming of the Europeans has meant to the Aborigines. The happiness and tranquillity of which he spoke must be measured against the present day inequalities and degradations if the full measure of our debt to the original settlers of this country is ever to be paid.

Another of the apt ironies of the Cook celebrations, perhaps overlooked by those responsible for the public manifestations of bi-centennialism, lies in the holing of the oil tanker Oceanic Grandeur and the consequent polluting of the Queensland coast at the very time that the question of off-shore oil drilling and pollution was being discussed.

Almost exactly two hundred years previously, a little more than two hundred miles away, Cook's ship Endeavour was similarly holed by an unseen coral reef. As a result, Cook and his crew were obliged to spend some six weeks on shore in northern Queensland while the ship was beached and repaired. It was during this stay near present day Cooktown that Cook, together with the naturalists and artists who accompanied him, was able to observe and record the extraordinary flora and fauna to be found in "New South Wales." The complete newness and unexpectedness of
much of it can be seen from the early attempts at description. "A mouse-coloured animal, very swift, and about the size of a greyhound", says the first recorded glimpse of a kangaroo. "About as large as a one-gallon keg, as black as the devil and with wings and two horns on its head", wrote the sailor who first sighted a flying-fox. The profusion of fish, insects, birds and reptiles; the magnificent and yet (for sailors) frightening nature of the reef itself: these were the things which impressed the men of the *Endeavour* and which they recorded in their journals.

It makes sad reading today. With the greater part of the Barrier Reef facing imminent destruction from the crown-of-thorns starfish, which has bred profusely since the removal of its natural enemies, the holing of the *Oceanic Grandeur* and the consequent oil-slick once more underlines the cause and the need of conservation. The havoc wrought by the starfish is insignificant beside the damage which could result from off-shore oil drilling, as the relatively minor accident of the tanker bears out.

And of course the moral doesn’t end there. The great turtle of the Barrier Reef, profuse in 1770, faces extinction two hundred years later. So too (and it must be said again) does the swift mouse-coloured animal. Recently I have travelled through more than two thousand miles of Australian east-coast countryside and in that time I saw fewer kangaroos than Cook and his men saw in a one mile radius of their little encampment.

The full extent of the crisis facing the natural Australian environment is only becoming apparent. If we look at the way the Aborigines have been treated, however, we should not be surprised by it. It is a crisis which cannot be solved by a few laws prohibiting this or outlawing that. Not until the federal government (and it must be on a federal level) takes account of ecological research and initiates a programme of total environmental conservation of specific areas can we breathe at all freely over the preservation of our national heritage. Such a move should have begun years ago but at least in this year it would be apposite to start amends.

L.N.C.