St Louis reputedly has a long association with Hegelianism dating back to the middle of the last century. Recently its leading university, Washington University, has become one of the most radical “hegelian marxist” centres in the United States. The critical theorists are concentrated in the department of sociology, where they constitute a strong minority, and in political science. There appear to be two distinct wings with little overlap. The first group is associated with “Telos,” whose editor, Italian-born Paul Piccone, teaches sociology at Washington University. Until recently the “bible” for these men was the Reification chapter in Lukacs’ “History and Class Consciousness” – they regard themselves simply as hegelian marxists -- for whom theories like that of Louis Althusser are, as Piccone himself put it, a heap of horse shit, and not even worthy of mention. Theirs is a “vogue” for Gramsci is now starting in the Anglo-Saxon world, just as it is declining in Italy.

From the outset two themes emerged in the conference: the first centred on the relationship between Lenin and Gramsci, the second on the meaning and status of “praxis” in Gramsci’s work.

The first issue was almost inevitable (and linked to the second) because the P.C.I. orthodoxy has always been that in some sense or other Gramsci was a Leninist. The senses have, in fact, often changed, and the whole PCI thesis is, as a recent article in “Political Studies” suggested, discredited unless the normal notion of Leninism as a theory of the need for the party’s pre-eminence is discarded for that of a Lenin who is a philosopher of praxis, without realising this theoretically. Suffice to say that at the conference not only was the orthodoxy criticised from all sides, it was also treated as quite simply, what was being discussed was marxist theory, whether they understood it or not. Both had grasped a little of the truth: marxism cannot simply be popularised because this is “democratic,” and yet it must be practicable.

Fundamentally, practice was understood by most speakers, including Sallach, and a number of younger members of the audience, to be a “consciousness-raising” activism through unified action in the workplace and elsewhere, particularly among the working-class or “underfolk” as one man put it. The role of theory was as an adequation of reality and served as an impetus to action. As Gramsci put it: “the only categorical imperative in marxism is ‘workers of the world unite.’” While this possibly led to pragmatism, and this issue was discussed by Arato, even despite its theoretical limitations it seemed acceptable to some of the “Telos” group.

It was at the evening session that the “Left” criticism of Gramsci, so well-known to students of Italian affairs, was first explicated by Silvia Federici. She felt that even Gramsci’s theory of practice, as proposed above, was useless and “bourgeois,” that in fact he was insufficiently aware of the crucial factor of political economy in marxism. Because of this he under-estimated the classical marxist categories of class in favor of a “frontism” which led inevitably to the PCI’s policies, and he over-estimated the factor of work. Since the whole thesis, one common to the extra-parliamentary Left in Italy, rests on a particular set of facts, she was criticised by Frank Adler, Arato and Davidson on fac-
tual grounds. It appeared to us that the whole thesis against Gramsci was based on a mythological history of his life and times.

On the final day the paper from Budapest reiterated the general theme that Gramsci was not a Leninist and that his main theoretical contribution was to practice. David Sallach then developed a very interesting discussion of how hegemony worked in the United States, by going back, marxist fashion, to the empirical facts. He rejected strongly the incalculation thesis, developing the institutional theory of hegemony and, of course, calling into question the whole theory of the "enemy" implicit in class struggle theorists of the crude sort. Sallach's paper marked the close of the conference. By general agreement it had been a great success. "Telos" intends to bring out a special Gramsci issue as a result, in which many of the papers will be published. Some, like that of Boggs, have already appeared elsewhere.

Perhaps most impressive for an outsider was the degree of theoretical sophistication of the audience, many of whose names would be known to readers of American and British Left journals. We have been fortunate in bringing back as an example an article by one of Zeitlin's students, which discusses Louis Althusser at length. Incidentally, Althusser is regarded as "nothing from nothing" on every Left campus visited.

Long discussions at mealtimes and exchange of work proved valuable on all sides. It emerged from these talks that while the "Telos" group especially is very sophisticated theoretically, on the whole the US movement lags very far behind the Australian movement in its activism and its impact on society generally, and that while we look to them, they look to us for guidance. Hence the prominence accorded to "ALR's" delegate at the conference. A short visit to the Teamsters Union offices explained why they are so far behind!

It is pleasing to see that in the United States: 1) initiatives like the Gramsci conference are not lost. The conference inaugurates a course on Gramsci at Washington University. Among those who will give seminars will be Genovese and Nowell-Smith; 2) that this part of the US Left are not victims of the latest fads, in the way that "New Left Review" sometimes comes perilously close to being.

As a by-product of his attendance "ALR's" delegate was able to speak on a number of other campuses in the United States on Gramsci, Sartre and marxism generally. "ALR" has a surprisingly high standing in the USA and articles from it are used on campuses there (e.g. Taft's article on the Leninist party). It should immediately engage in a promotion campaign there to strengthen its sales and to make sure that it reaches US bookshops more often. We have arranged to exchange advertisements with "Socialist Revolution" and "Telos." Several Americans have solicited copies of CPA programmes and literature.

-- Alastair Davidson.

Kelvin Rowley's review of Eric Aarons' book, "Philosophy for an Exploding World" (ALR No. 39), raises a number of important theoretical, philosophical and political issues. However, this is not done in any analytical way but rather by means of assertions and bald statements. The issues emerge almost despite his lack of analysis; we learn more about Rowley's attitudes than we do about the inadequacies of Aarons' book.

It is not my intention here to defend or criticise the book. Instead I wish to examine several key statements by Rowley which indicate what I believe is an incorrect approach and attitude to the problems he raises.

Rowley begins with the assertion that the book is "the product of disillusionment." Now this may or may not be so. However, at best this would be an explanation for why the book was written; it tells us nothing about the merits or demerits of the book itself. Rowley seems to imply that disillusionment is a bad reason for writing a book. However, it may be a good reason. Whether the subjective psychological reason for the writing of a book has affected the book itself in good or bad ways can only be assessed by analysis of the book itself, and the issues which it raises. When we come to look at Rowley's specific criticisms we find that whatever the book's inadequacies might be he has not really found them. Rather, he demonstrates the inadequacies of his own position.

Rowley quotes Aarons on how the affluence of contemporary capitalism has meant that it has at least partly solved the problems of mass poverty with which the revolutionary Left was once concerned, yet how in doing so capitalism has only demonstrated its own appalling emptiness. Rowley does not indicate whether he agrees or disagrees with this proposition, so we are left without a real debate.

The review then moves on to the question of economic reductionism. Rowley manages to confuse two quite different arguments here. There is the question of whether classical Marxism was economic-reductionist, and there is the question of whether reductionism is correct or incorrect. Now Aarons nowhere "assumes that [economic reductionism and mass impoverishment] are Marxist theory." He is concerned to criticise these doctrines, which rightly or wrongly were taken to be Marxism by whole generations of Marxist revolutionaries. Since economic reductionism still exerts an influence, there is a point to criticising it. Whether Marxism is itself economic reductionism is a matter for some debate. It is true that the major Marxist theorists (why Althusser deserves to be listed alongside Lenin, Gramsci, Trotsky and Mao escapes me) did warn against vulgar Marxist reductionism. However, this does not mean that they all agreed or were consistent in their own evaluation of the relation between the economy and other social structures, and the relative importance of the economy. My own feeling is that the body of Marxist theory contains many insights which point away from economic reductionism, but that the Marxist theoretical tradition taken as a whole has heavily emphasised economic analysis and has not yet made a full and extended analysis of other aspects and sectors of human society. Further, even those who opposed reductionism wrote works which lent credence to the vulgar Marxist interpretation -- with the important exception of Gramsci.

This brings us to the question of whether Marxism as it is at present can give a completely "adequate account" of contemporary society. No theory or body of thought is ever complete -- reality continually presents us with problems which our current theories cannot properly contain. If the gap between theory and reality is wide enough, we must change our theories. In my opinion Marxism is one of the most comprehensive and adequate intellectual traditions of our time, but it does have deficiencies, inadequacies and inconsistencies. These
have to be rectified not only from within Marxism itself, but also by drawing on all that is best in the work of other intellectual schools and traditions. One criterion for the adequacy of Marxism is whether it remains an open intellectual tradition, subject to change and development, or whether it closes itself off and becomes a set of ossified dogma.

Rowley ignores all this by his false assertion that Aarons sees Marxism as inadequate because it is economic reductionist. There are other reasons why Marxism may or may not be inadequate. Aarons raises a number of problems which certainly don't exhaust the list. Among them are the problems of human consciousness, will and practice, and the relation between consciousness and social structure. I would not claim that the book covers these points satisfactorily nor that it is right in every detail. However, Rowley does not lead us into a profitable debate because he doesn't discuss any of the real issues which the book raised.

Moreover, Rowley is quite wrong when he contends that Aarons "does not see the doctrine of economic reductionism as fundamentally incorrect." According to Rowley, the book is arguing that the old doctrines need to be complemented by "a new emphasis on inner, subjective conditions." Now the book does not say that economic reductionism should be complemented with this new aspect. What emerges is that classical Marxist political economy (of the non-reductionist variety) needs to be complemented with a theory of human consciousness - how attitudes, beliefs, values and a commitment to revolution arise from the given conditions of capitalist society. The whole history of capitalism and of the revolutionary movements which have tried to overthrow it show that this is a legitimate concern. For the failure of revolution in the West is at least as much a problem of political practice and mass consciousness as it is of the dynamics of capitalist economic development. More accurately it is a problem of both these and of the relation between them. All this seems to have escaped Rowley's notice.

For him, to pose the problem of human consciousness alongside that of traditional economic analysis is "eclecticism." Now eclecticism is a much-misused word in the Marxist vocabulary. It describes what happens when someone tries to throw together, in a confused, unsystematic way, different philosophical, theoretical and political views which are either incompatible or perhaps even contradictory. To prove that someone's theories are eclectic one must demonstrate inconsistency and incompatibility between the various components of the theory. Rowley does not do this. He seems to imply that because Aarons raises a new perspective on human society alongside other perspectives he must therefore be eclectic. In this sense Marx could have been called eclectic because he forged his theory from three quite different traditions: German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism. Of course Marx was not eclectic; he developed his theory by drawing on a multitude of contemporary intellectual traditions (a process from which some modern "Marxists" could learn a thing or two). As Lenin noted, these three "sources" became the three "components" of Marxism.

Rowley seems to be suggesting that only a "complete" theory would be a non-eclectic one. However, as Aarons correctly points out, modern science has more or less given up the search for a unitary theory as a false and unattainable goal. Moreover, in raising various problems the book is not attempting to develop a more general theory, although doubtless this needs to be done. Hence the real issues remain: does Rowley think that the particular points and analyses of the book are wrong and mutually incompatible? If he does, let him demonstrate this by argument and counter-analysis, not by haulling out unsubstantiated labels to pin on his opponents.

One of the main points of the review is to establish that "Aarons adopts a position of idealism, of cultural reductionism." This, it is claimed, is shown by the book's concern with subjectivity, human values, ideas and beliefs. Rowley objects to the use of a quote from Parsons, "high priest of bourgeois sociology." Now Parsons is undoubtedly a major ideologist of capitalism, but this does not necessarily make everything he writes wrong. For instance, his concern to develop a model of society as a system is remarkably close to that of the Marxist structuralists, despite his quite different starting point. The particular point Parsons is making is more or less correct in my opinion. Rowley is quite wrong to say that if moral standards hold a society together then 19th century Europe was a Christian society rather than a capitalist one. Clearly, the moral values and standards of capitalism were as much a part (in fact more) of social beliefs in 19th century Europe as were Christian ethics. Indeed, we might properly describe Europe at that time as a Christian-capitalist society, as opposed to, say, a Buddhist-capitalist society. There is also the question of the relationship between Christian beliefs and capitalist ethics.

In any case, this very point was made before Parsons, by none other than Antonio Gramsci, who spoke of the problem which any "conception of the world" faced: "This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and unify." If Aarons is idealist then so is Gramsci. Again, Rowley does not really tackle the issue: is it true or not that ideologies and beliefs help to keep a society together as a functioning unit? I think it is true, although there is also the question of the relation between ideological and social structures, and the question of whether people always behave according to the beliefs they espouse.

We now come to what I believe to be a central issue. Rowley accuses Aarons of denying that "capitalism is ... an intrinsically self-destructive system." According to Rowley, Marx said it was, and he believes that Aarons has substituted an ethical judgment of capitalism for this belief in capitalism's inevitable downfall. Now it is debatable whether Marx thought that capitalism was intrinsically self-destructive. Partly it is a question of what is meant by this phrase. But I think that Marx did tend in this direction, especially in some of his later works. [Against this, we can counterpose statements of Marx such as "There are no permanent crises."] However, the real question is not what Marx said, but whether the statement is true.

The great contribution of Lenin was to have been the first Marxist to resolutely oppose the determinist interpretation of Marxism which held that capitalism would inevitably collapse. He made the point that there was no crisis, no matter how severe, from which capitalism could not extricate itself if the labor movement allowed it to. Lenin's stress on the importance of political struggle to gain the ideological support of the workers shows a similar concern with mass con-
sciousness to that of Gramsci. In this sense Aarons is following up their concerns. Naturally the book is not merely repeating Lenin and Gramsci; modern capitalism has its own features and problems which must be investigated. The book may be right or wrong in its analysis of consciousness, subjectivity and values, but this must be shown by concrete analysis, not by accusing Aarons of "idealism".

Rowley displays his own preferences when he says that in the book "Marxism is accordingly demoted from a science to a humanist ethic." As argued elsewhere in this issue, Rowley's own conception of science and Marxism is wrong and smacks of a real philosophical idealism. However, leaving this aside, it is simply not true that the book anywhere says anything like that Marxism should not be a science, and become just an ethic instead. Unlike Rowley's quite wrong formulation, the book does not pose the one against the other. Marxism is a great revolutionary tradition precisely because it combines scientific analysis with ethical aspects and does not try to artificially separate the two. Indeed, as Norman Geras points out in a telling critique of Althusser which Rowley should read again, many of Marx's scientific concepts have an ethical dimension. For instance, his concept of exploitation is both a scientific and a critical-ethical one. To rob Marxism of either its scientific analysis or of its ethical and critical dimension is to impoverish it. Anyone who tries to do this (as Rowley seems to) helps to diminish its adequacy as a revolutionary theory capable of guiding the revolutionary movement.

Thus it is not Aarons who poses "the moral problems facing humanity as a whole" against "the petty problems of history and social structure." Rowley does that, and he is just as one-sided and wrong as Aarons would have been if he had done it from the opposite point of view.

A few final comments on gross inadequacies and mistakes in Rowley's review:

- Aarons is supposed to collapse Marxism into "romantic denunciations of modernity." Where does he do this? The book is a critique of capitalism from the point of view of overthrowing it, and establishing socialism; at no point does it call for a retreat to the past, condemn technology or anything remotely similar.
- Rowley speaks of the "great ecology scare." Typically, it is not clear what he means. If he refers to ruling class use of the ecology issue as a means to blind people to the wrongs and inadequacies of capitalism, fair enough. But if he is joining with those "Marxists" who say that the ecology-environment crisis is not real at all, then he is so wrong that it's not funny. A few facts and concrete analysis would help, as always.

- He accuses the book of not having done things which it never intended to do (e.g., analyse the dynamics of the modern capitalist economy). Maybe the book should have done these things, but it should be judged on what it did do.

- Rowley states that the "consciousness of humanity" is nothing! The conscience of humanity may be bad, but it is certainly not nothing. How can one explain the mass movements against the Vietnam war, perhaps the most important and radical movements of the sixties, without seeing them as the result of the outraged conscience of vast layers of people in the West? At no point does Aarons imply that the importance of consciousness and conscience means that revolutionaries should rely on "goodwill." Like so many assertions of Rowley, this too is a figment of his imagination.

Finally, Rowley makes the contention that the practical consequences of the book are that "attempts to wage the class struggle as effectively as possible, hopefully culminating in the overthrow of the capitalist class and the seizure of power by the working class, are to be replaced by endless, fruitless appeals to the 'conscience of humanity'..." This is a quite unwarranted assertion and demonstrates Rowley's misreading of the book. First of all there is the point of humanity's "conscience" made above. Secondly, at no stage in the book did Aarons say or suggest that class struggle was to be "replaced." In my view the book could perhaps have drawn its political conclusions more explicitly, but the implications are clear enough. And these are precisely in the direction of making the struggle against capitalism more effective by intervening in the social process in certain ways. The book's stance is to elaborate a Gramscian counter-hegemonic strategy on certain issues, and opposes the various brands of Marxist determinism which in fact lead to political passivity. Rowley fits in with these determinist strands and therefore I believe it is he who does not grasp the need to more effectively wage the struggle against capitalism.

Aarons may be wrong or right on these points, but Rowley needs to give us more concrete analysis of the real themes of the book in order to show this.

-- BRIAN AARONS.