In this issue we publish a summary of the papers delivered at the Sydney symposium to mark the centenary of the first appearance of Karl Marx's Capital. A summary of the papers read at the Melbourne symposium will appear in the next issue. Some controversial views were expressed and these will be the subject of discussion in later issues.

TO MARK the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Marx's Capital, Australian Left Review recently organised a seminar in Sydney on various facets of Marx's life and work. As befitted such an occasion, the tone of the papers given was largely historical: Marx as a politician, a philosopher, a man and an economist. An effort not so much to interpret Marx for the present as to show how he reacted to his own times and how his eventual position as probably the most influential thinker of the nineteenth century came about.

Mr. Phillip Richardson, of the University of Queensland, delivered the first paper on "Marx as Politician." He pointed out that Marx's political views were never static, but like the rest of his thought, in a continual state of development and flux. His busy life, ill-health, and his eventual retreat to England gave him little time to develop a systematic political standpoint. One result of this is that to familiarise ourselves with Marx's political views we must search widely, not only through books and pamphlets, but through letters and articles as well.

Mr Richardson stressed that probably the basic factor in Marx's continually evolving political thought was his general indifference to organised political parties and to their role in the class struggle. Although his views seem to have changed towards the end of his life, his characteristic assumption was that socialism would be established in Europe regardless of political parties; perhaps even in spite of them.

But if he was wrong in this, and came to realise he was wrong, Marx's main contribution to the political world was his transformation of the socialist movement from a heterogeneous confusion of well-wishers, do-gooders, anarchists and adventurers into a move-
ment spear-headed by the conviction that the application of scientific principles, deduced and demonstrated by Marx, was the key to grasping and moulding the significance of the class struggle. And it was through the First International, of which Marx was a member, that such principles were first widely promulgated.

It was this essentially pragmatic beginning which the speaker stressed: Marx had to jettison much of the socialist thinking of his time as useless because dogmatic or impractical. He sought to develop instead ideas that were demonstrative, flexible and of some value in the political world of the moment. This is even reflected in his view of political parties as something "thrown up", rather than consciously formed and manipulated. It may have been the eventual fate of the First International which caused Marx to change his mind on this issue, for the basic thing wrong with the International was precisely what was wrong with Marx's notion of the loose-knit political party. It was composed of such disparate elements that its full effectiveness as an implementor of Marx's ideas could not be felt. Had it been welded into a cohesive unit, it would have been of much greater value than it was. History might be moving along an inevitable path, but that is no reason not to kick it along a bit. This was the basic difference between Marx's conception of the party and that, say, of Lenin.

Mr Richardson also pointed out that, living as he did his later years in England, Marx's political interests still remained centred in Europe, and hence the close analysis that on-the-spot observation can make possible was not carried out. The British Museum had a lot more to do with the development of Marxism than did the House of Parliament or even the Trades Union Congress.

One indirect result of this is that it is impossible to say that Marx's view of politics, or of the state, was a mechanistic one. It was always too much in a state of flux to become rigid or formalized. And certainly his views on class, and class-structure have been greatly over-simplified, to the detriment of the Marxist movement as a whole. Marx was only too well aware that a continually evolving economic system, even if one in which the general tendencies of the future were discernible, meant a continually evolving class structure. He may, as Mr Richardson suggested, have underestimated the role of nationalism in the development of the class struggle, but he certainly did not underestimate the complexity of the class struggle itself.

IN DEALING with "Marx as Philosopher" Mr. J. D. Blake had a similar emphasis. He pointed out that whilst Marx has been widely recognised as an economist, historian and sociologist, it has
been customary to ignore his contribution to philosophy, or else to over-simplify a position of great complexity. Marx's formal studies began with a course in philosophy and it was his mature philosophical position which gives such a marked degree of unity to all his work, even in the most diverse fields.

But it would be a mistake to regard Marx's philosophy as one to be dogmatically adhered to by all claiming to be Marxists. As Marx himself learned, it is only by rejecting hypotheses and theories which don't correspond to reality that progress can be made. If reality is straight-jacketed into theory, it will be to the detriment of both.

Mr Blake went on to argue that, with the recent publication in English of Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, it is now possible to see the continual development of Marx's philosophy. Not that this is a universally held belief. The French Marxist Louis Althusser, for example, has argued that the Manuscripts are too much influenced by Hegel, and he therefore has minimized their importance ("an idealist anthropology") in favor of Marx's more mature works.

But the real strength of Althusser's current work on Marx lies in the way in which he has drawn attention to the lack of faith in mechanical economic determinism in Marx's philosophical work. All too often Marxists (and others) have been content to sit back smugly in the belief that economic forces "out there", beyond their control or comprehension, are at work in shaping their destinies. It was one of Marx's great contributions to the development of materialist philosophy that he pointed out that Man is not a passive reflecting medium of an external objective reality which alone is active. Men never act on reality without some preconception—even if only on an elementary or primitive level. When men ask questions of reality they are already altering it and making it human. As part of nature, thinking about and acting upon nature, and himself in the process. We do not grasp nature except in this humanly sensuous, active manner.

All men, far from being merely acted upon by some mystical economic or historical process are an integral part of that process and can alter or shape its development. The philosophy can describe the men, but the men also mould the philosophy.

Once this point has been grasped, Mr Blake argued, it takes on a central position in Marx's philosophy. It demonstrates, for example, the truly humanist element in Marx's thought. It radically alters the all-too-common notion of Marx as the coldly-calculating economic historian, plotting in facts and figures the destinies of his fellow-men. It shows, instead, what had always been apparent to those who, like Lenin, had grasped the essence of Marxism: that human beings can never be regarded as pawns in a game of chess played by the rules of economic determinism. For it is a
realization of the essentially human control of history, a belief in man’s ability to shape his own life, which lies at the core of Marx’s philosophy.

THE THIRD PAPER given at the seminar was by Professor C. Manning Clark on “Marx the Man”. Professor Clark’s bias, like that of Mr. Blake, was towards Marx the humanist, towards the man who led the children of the world towards the promised land, not only in the tradition of Abraham, Moses and Christ, but of Dostoevski, Newman and Lenin as well.

Marx came from a prominent Jewish family, but his father’s rejection of the religion of his fore-fathers when Marx the boy was only six, and the subsequent acceptance of the family into the Lutheran Church, may have had a profound influence on his thought. The need to reject the past and to strive for acceptance in an entirely new world can’t be lightly glossed over in discussing the nature of Marx’s personality.

This markedly religious background, and the influence of religious thinkers, were the elements of Marx’s makeup most stressed by Professor Clark. It was after reading Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, for example, that Marx formulated his first great discovery. He said this:

“that because of religious belief man had become alienated from his true mission in life; because of religious belief men had pursued shadows.” As his mentor Feuerbach put it: “Religion was a dream, the dream of the human mind, not the reality.” Through religion, as Marx put it, man had dualised himself, he had become a stranger to himself.

By 1844 he had drawn a very simple conclusion: “the criticism of religion,” he said, “ends with the precept that the supreme being for man is man.” That was in 1844.

Like his compatriots Goethe and Schiller he placed his faith in humanity, and worshipped at the shrine of mankind.

Professor Clark went on to suggest that there were perhaps four main keys to understanding Marx. There was his reading — especially Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Goethe. Aeschylus because, like the Greek, Marx believed that men could and should steal fire from heaven. If Marx had compassion for the fate of Sisyphus it was through Prometheus that he looked to the future. And in Shakespeare and Goethe he also saw and emphasised this human potentiality.

He also had a great gift for seeing right into the heart of a problem. We only have to look at his few brief references to
Australia to see that this was so—he certainly understood what was going on here.

Looking at the world in general he also realized that the central struggle of life is not between God and the Devil for the souls of men, but between men themselves for the control of society: the class struggle. It was in objectifying this struggle, and in clarifying its issues, that his life's work lay. It was this word "struggle", Professor Clark said, that Marx saw as the core of reality. He was once asked "What is?" and he replied "Struggle".

In some of his amplifications and predictions about future developments Marx was certainly wrong—as Mr Richardson had pointed out in relation to nationalism, or the role of the highly organized political party. But in essence Marx the man was right: it was his vision of society and of man's potentiality that showed the new way forward.

IN THE FINAL PAPER, "Marx the Economist", Mr. Bernie Taft pointed out that Capital has been called "the most influential unread book in existence". Nonetheless, Marx as an economist has been the subject of increasing interest. But Mr. Taft suggested several reasons why Marx has been misinterpreted and misunderstood.

Capital after all is an incomplete work—some problems Marx wanted to deal with later he never got around to. Others are barely touched upon. In many ways too it was Marx's thoroughness which prevented Capital being completed—his attention to detail was painstakingly accurate.

All too often Marx's opponents have delighted in pointing out his omissions, whilst his supporters have displayed an equal tendency to regard whatever he wrote as holy writ. Both attitudes have resulted only in misunderstanding and confusion.

But why is there a revival of interest in Marx's economic work today? One obvious reason is the continued progress of the USSR, and the rapid economic growth in the socialist world. Another factor is that groups of non-Marxist economists are turning more attention to the practical problems posed by state monopoly capitalist development, especially the question of economic growth. This has meant a more objective examination of economic processes than was common previously—in other words, a more Marxist approach.

What first led Marx to economics was his desire "to lay bare the laws of motion of modern society" (Capital). He had realized that the general shape of any given historical period was determined
by the prevailing mode of production — which, in turn, implied the whole class structure of society:

"His objective was to give society a consciousness of itself, to explain the reasons for its conflicts and social struggles and to find the way to their solution.

With this vision in his mind Marx made an extraordinarily thorough examination of the economic facts of the past and the present.

The most notable fact to him was the existence in all forms of class society of a huge mass of unearned income. In capitalist society this took the form of nett profit on capital, rent on land and interest.

The theoretical problem that faced Marx, as he saw it, was to account for the existence and the persistence of these forms of unearned income in a society in which there was quite a high degree of mobility and competition."

Mr Taft argued that the crucial question of Marxian economics is "Do his main conclusions apply today, is his method of study still significant?" Of course some of his theories have dated or been shown to be wrong, but Marx's system is capable of much further development and provides important guide-lines for what is happening at the present time. But it would be a mistake to insist that the letter of Marx is more important than the spirit. For this is to treat Marx's economic thinking in a non-Marxist way.

It was in developing his labor theory of value that Marx made his most sweeping contribution to economics. In capitalist economics the emphasis has traditionally been placed on a theory of exchange and the utilization of profit for further investment. The centre of Marx's theory is that the law of value is the key to understanding the economic basis of society.

In dealing with the question of exploitation Marx's conclusions remain equally valid. Though the living standard in Western capitalist countries has risen, so too has the degree of exploitation — Marx's concept of increasing polarization has been vindicated.

The task facing Marxists today, Mr Taft concluded, is to develop in the spirit of Marx economic theories explaining in detail the nature of modern economic life, especially economic growth. The development of state monopoly capitalism and the technological revolution have created other problems which are still not fully understood. It is not a question of Marx the Economist not having done his job; it is really a question of his followers not doing theirs.