DR. IAN TURNER of the Monash University opened with a paper on "Marx as an Historian". He pointed out that to discuss Marx as an historian, one must consider his theory of history, which flows from his theory of society, rather than his writing about historical events which, although brilliant, was not extensive.

The great paradox of Marx as historian, Dr. Turner stressed, is that, while many of his specific predictions about the future of capitalist society were wrong, he nevertheless remains the most influential thinker of his and our time. To understand this paradox, one must think of Marx as a man of his own time and place—mid-nineteenth century Britain, when Britain was the dominant world power economically, politically and intellectually. Like other thinkers of his time, Marx believed in progress, but unlike the others he did not regard mid-nineteenth century Britain as the culmination of progress. Rather he looked to the class struggle and the victory of the proletariat to consummate man’s progress towards freedom. This is the source of the paradox. Marx was an ideologist as well as a social theorist—an ideologist in both senses of the word, in that he believed in the good society, and in that he constructed a system of historical theory which sought to prove the inevitability of what he wanted to happen, of the good society.

Present day marxists, Dr. Turner declared, must use Marx’s own method of thought about history and the part played by theory and ideology in social change in order to separate Marx’s ideology from his methodology. A realistic analysis of contemporary bourgeois society suggests that the inevitable collapse of capitalism and victory of the proletariat predicted by Marx is unlikely to occur, Dr. Turner claimed. But such an analysis can only be made by using Marx’s method—by investigating the effects of technolog-
ical change on social structure and ultimately on social theory, and the new conditions under which social change will occur.

To do this means also to adopt the other aspect of Marx’s ideology—the belief in and search for the good society—while recognising that this is ideology and not science. For what Marx is finally concerned with is a value—freedom, the belief that man alone can unchain himself.

BRUCE McFARLANE, from the Australian National University, opened his paper on “Marx as an Economist” by asking: “Increasing concentration of wealth, rapid elimination of small and medium-scale enterprises, progressive limitation of industrial competition, incessant technological progress accompanied by an ever-growing importance of fixed capital and machinery. Is this a recent analysis of US capitalism? Is it a text book on contemporary institutions? Is it the US census? No, it is Kark Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 3, in a series of superb prognostications.” Mr. McFarlane pointed out that Marx not only discerned the “laws of motion” or the dynamics of capitalism, his work also embraced the exposure of exploitation under capitalism, the paramount importance of understanding the relations between men in production and not only the problems of the exchange of physical goods.

The influence of Hegel is evident in Marx’s work. It accounts for certain difficulties about reading the first part of *Capital*, where Marx “flirts with Hegel’s terminology”, it is also involved in Marx’s presentation of the labor theory of value.

Mr. McFarlane contrasted the more primitive and simplified presentation of Marx’s economic theories in the Communist Manifesto with the more complex presentation in *Capital*. Unfortunately some “marxists” have reduced marxian economics to the more primitive level of the Manifesto.

Marx’s method is to explain first the social relations between men, then the operation of the main laws of capitalism and then to take into account exceptions, counter-tendencies. The primacy of social relations between men which underlie market relationships and determine the size and utilisation of economic surplus is stressed, and it is this basic method of Marx which is a most useful way of laying bare the economic laws of a given social system.

Marx’s idea of “surplus value” as the source of capitalist accumulation or of saving which is the basis for investment and economic growth, has been generalised to the concept of economic surplus as the difference between current output and actual current consumption. Mr. McFarlane stressed that this idea of economic
surplus and the mode of its utilisation is an extremely important tool for understanding the essence of various economic systems.

After criticising some distortions of dialectical and historical materialism by Stalin, Mr. McFarlane dealt with some problems of alienation for which the labor theory of value and the concept of surplus value are key elements in Marx's approach to alienation under capitalism. On the problem of producers' versus consumers' interests, Mr McFarlane made the observation that this may not have been due to the difficulties of the Soviet industrialisation process but that the ability to neglect consumers may also have roots in Marx's theory itself.

In conclusion Mr. McFarlane expressed his disagreement with two current tendencies of interpreting Marx. The first one is the fashion of splitting Marx and Engels, and ridiculing Engels as a mere vulgariser of Marx's work. There is no basis for such an interpretation. The second tendency is to re-interpret Marx by the growing emphasis of the "Young Marx". It is said that the "early" Marx, embracing Hegel's vision and methodology, stressed humanism, showed how the concept of alienation could be used to explain the essence of the State, of systems of exploitation—and that this humanitarianism was overshadowed by later economic analysis. Such an approach leads to the ridiculous notion of value—judgment free, "neutral" social science. It is really a retreat to Hegel, a shying away from the struggle against the specific character of modern capitalism and colonialism. It misrepresents the true Marx who was above all a fighter who stood unreservedly and passionately with the oppressed. That is where he would stand were he alive today.

DR. ALAN ROBERTS, of Monash University, stated that Marx was a philosopher before he was an economist or historian, and the unique structure of Capital has been shown to depend crucially on his philosophical positions. Yet these are given much less attention than his other researches; why? Partly, Dr. Roberts claimed, it is due to the retreat of philosophy in general from the spotlight which it occupied in Marx's day, to a backstage obscurity in which it is valued only by various scattered social groups. The fragmentation of knowledge, which is linked with an aggressively empirical methodology, is so current that even as unified a thinker as Marx is "picked over" and selected from.

But even among those still interested in philosophy, we find for example the mainstream of English-speaking academic philosophy running clear of marxism, and not even confronting it. Some recent examination has revealed the inbuilt mechanisms in the empiricist outlook which do not so much deny marxist positions
as exclude them from consideration altogether. Moreover, the empiricist school has produced its own formidable critic in the person of the later Wittgenstein, whose positions on a number of fundamental issues resemble strikingly those common to Hegel and Marx.

Another reason for this academic neglect of marxist philosophy, Dr. Roberts claimed, has been its widespread identification with the “official” version taught in the USSR and of wide currency in most Communist Parties. This version replaces the essence of Marx’s philosophy, its critical approach, by an anxiety over “correctness” and a recitation of formulas. The acceptance of Engels’ “dialectics of nature” has greatly assisted this process. Criticisms of this “scientizing” of Marx’s essentially human-oriented outlook have been made by Lukacs, Sartre, Hyppolite and others; Sartre’s arguments in particular need to be considered.

Despite their comparative neglect, in favor of his other studies, Marx’s philosophical positions still have great value today. Two of his aphoristic Theses on Feuerbach illustrate the deep contemporary significance to be found in his criticisms. The XIth thesis is not a pious bow to “practicalism”, as often thought, but contains a profound theoretical stand, implicitly critical of, for example, much present-day sociological research. The IIIrd Thesis, with its account of how the masses make and are made by historical change, is a theoretical refutation of all forms of elitism in history, and of “substitutionism”. It provides a theoretical perspective within which any programs for sweeping political change must be viewed—but seldom are.

IN THE FINAL PAPER, “Marx as a Political Leader”, Mr. Eric Aarons pointed out that it is possible to approach this subject in different ways. He suggested that the most fruitful course is to pose this question: “A politician has to react to, make decisions on or in political situations. How did Marx react, how did he make his political decisions and why?”

Before attempting to answer this question, Mr. Aarons dealt with the models of society that Marx had established. Noting that there is always a difference between the models or ideal types and reality, Mr. Aarons asks, if these models don’t actually exist, what use are they? Indeed there has been a trend in the US in particular to reject large theorising and to concentrate solely on detailed empirical investigation.

Conceding that the creating and proper use of models has many difficulties and that it can encourage dogmatism and rigidity of thought, he nevertheless pointed out that if we reject the use
of abstract and idealised models, we block in advance any possi­bility of achieving a better understanding of social life, because its complexities do not permit any other procedure for acquiring understanding.

Turning to the question posed above, Mr. Aarons suggested that in looking at the nature of political situations (on an international or national level) we may select three important characteristics:

1. They constitute what may be called a “whole situation.”
2. They involve people—and as nations, classes, groups, organisa­tions and individuals in struggle, of one sort or another with each others.
3. They are real, they are merciless, they will not go away whatever one wishes.

Analysing those three characteristics Mr. Aarons first pointed out that we can not isolate or take out one aspect, one part of a whole situation except in theory. In fact all sides, aspects, forces, act and react together as a totality. Therefore no models or theories—which by their nature are abstract, idealised and partial—can provide directly the solution to a problem.

Each significant political analysis is a highly complex and creative endeavor, perhaps an art rather than a science. Marx’s own political estimates were always based on attempts to analyse “the whole” situation and what flowed from it in the given condi­tions. This gave rise to different estimates, attitudes and slogans at different times. The resultant seeming inconsistency is in fact an example of actual political consistency in pursuit of his political aims.

On the second characteristic of political situations, Mr. Aarons pointed out that as they involve people, all the human qualities, the arts of communication with and between people, the rational as well as the irrational, the advanced as well as the backward are involved and play their part.

The third characteristic—real, merciless, and not yielding to wishes or desires—has many practical implications. Those who want to avoid politics, to opt out, to engage in some “purer” activity are really making a political decision. By refraining from intervening they are leaving it to the various political forces active in the situation. Try as they may they cannot avoid political decisions and their effect.

Mr. Aarons makes some interesting observations on the con­nection between long range and immediate aims, between revo-
volutionary perspectives and "the immediately possible practical steps." He notes that those who reject the struggle round smaller issues on the grounds that "it is not revolutionary enough"—and this has been a continually recurring trend, including today—not only may not be particularly revolutionary but may even harm development of larger movements. If people are not in the ideological condition to achieve something limited, how can they be expected to achieve something far-reaching? Rather, they prepare for the latter struggling for the former.

Concluding his paper with reference to Marx’s extensive treatment of the oppression of the colored peoples by white imperialism, Mr. Aarons said: "Marx saw this not only as an assault on human rights and dignity of the colored; but as also robbing the white oppressor or condoner of oppression of his humanity and possibility of achieving significant social advancement. We see this with added force in the struggle over Vietnam today, which has many implications including for social advancement within Australia itself."

KARL MARX

The papers presented at symposia held in Sydney and Melbourne, July-August 1967, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the publication of Capital, the major work of Karl Marx, are now available.

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