DISCUSSION:

Dialogue on dialogue

FROM ANATHEMA TO DIALOGUE,
by Roger Garaudy.
Collins, 124 pp, $3.15.

ANATHEMA is an appropriate word to include in the title of any book dealing with the relationship between Christianity and marxism. The Vatican decree of 1870 asserting Papal infallibility concluded with the words "If anyone presume to contradict this our definition: let him be anathema". Thus the Roman Catholic church continued its war against civilization, materialism and all the lures and false philosophies which lead to damnation. And that was what would come to all who would not heed the warning; nothing less than anathema and consignment to hell. Of course time has changed the force of the curse but many Christians would still apply the term anathema to Communism.

Still I doubt if many Christians can consider the relationship between religion and marxism without recalling Marx’s rankling comment that "Religion is the opium of the people". In a single sentence he pronounced a historical anathema upon a religion which considered itself to have a nobler future than opium.

To many to-day the confrontation is still delightfully simple. It is between a religion which concerns itself with the higher things in man and his ultimate non-material future and which flourishes best in a Western society and an atheistic philosophy which sees religion as little more than the superstructure to a dated system of material relations and a hindrance to the improvement of man’s condition. That a mutual hurling of anathemas should cause any damage to either side is unthought of by the hurlers.

Of course it does cause damage; it reveals the shortsightedness of both the Christian and the marxist, it assumes that there is no need for dialogue and that there never will be. Marxists assume that flux is the essence of history and yet they retain rigid attitudes towards religion. Religion is not fossilized in history, a permanent brake on progress. Christians, likewise, do not apply any rule of hope to marxists. Thus they deny the role that marxists have in drawing attention to the evil and deceptions of society, they deny any common cause with what seems to be acknowledged evil. Yet there are obviously causes in which there is latently no conflict between marxist and Christian and yet where violent conflict exists. On the surface dialogue would seem to be essential and possible. In recent years dialogue has begun.

Professor Garaudy’s book examines the nature of this dialogue. The author is a leading marxist theorist and, as the cover states, “an influential member” of the central committee of the French Communist Party. He has participated in the dialogue and thus has some idea of the issues involved. The form of the book shows the change which the title suggests. It is arranged into three sections; an Introduction by a Jesuit, Father Rahner, two chapters by Garaudy on “The Realization of What is Basic by Christians” and “The Realization of What is Basic by Marxists” and an afterword by Father J. B. Metz. Each section deals with problems raised in
dialogue. As is suggested by the chapter headings, the authors seek to find similarities between Christians and marxists on the assumption that these common grounds will lead to further contact and dialogue. This dialogue shows part of the process by which two opposing groups are becoming aware of some of the common problems of our times.

Garaudy recognises that many of the difficulties of a dialogue stem from suspicion and intransigence and tries to counter these. It is plain that in our society, and in ones like ours, social hostility and suspicion is a deterrent to dialogue. Christians who communicate with communists are regarded by their often religiously indifferent brethren as being dupes. In many ways society proclaims an anathema which has more force than the anathema put forward by organized religion. Garaudy attempts to dull some of the suspicions of Christians by taking the experiences of the Catholic church in Poland and the USSR. He argues that true religion is possible in these countries because it has been wrested from the hands of the feudal and tsarist regimes. It is no longer a tool of oppression but one of liberation. This is how it ought to be and perhaps how it is, but Garaudy's bald theoretical statements do not really tell us much about what is. Surely the logical starting place for any dialogue would be in the Socialist countries of Europe, yet if there is dialogue in these countries then it is not mentioned in this book.

Thus he fails to answer the nagging conviction of many Christians—that marxism as a philosophy of revolution ultimately leads to the destruction of religion. Another problem that remains unsolved is the belief that religion might be an opium which can be used adeptly by any state whether it be capitalist or socialist. It is important to note that many of these suspicions originate from the fact that both philosophies have influenced men in creating institutions and that these are by no means models of the philosophies which led to their creation.

Paradoxically the inadequacies of these institutions have helped promote dialogue. As Professor Garaudy points out, both the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Roman Catholic Church have undergone an examination of conscience in recent years. He is referring of course to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and the Vatican Council. Both Church and Party have an idea of the future yet this idea has often been frustrated by an inability to recognise the conditions of the present and the nature of man. Religion, in particular, has encouraged indifference to the social conditions of the times and has merely consoled the people and made a virtue of suffering. It has covered social evils. Likewise marxists have held the ingenuous belief that the building of socialism is only a simple transition from "syllogism to idyll", and have ignored the "road of agony which lies between the dramatic epic of five-year plans and the tragedies of self-management". One could add much more.

Garaudy makes the obvious point that one of the essential prerequisites for the continued success of both Christianity and marxism is continual self-criticism and renewal. His thesis is that dialogue is an astringent to both marxist and Christian. They acquire some conception of the realities of action and lose the blindness that closed systems of ideology sometimes induce.

The author believes that Christians have had to examine their beliefs in recent years because of three main historical changes. Firstly, the develop-
ments in science have again led Christians to relate their religion to the empirical knowledge of the scientist and to attempt to de-mythologize their religion. Secondly, the success of the socialist revolutions in Europe and throughout the world has led to an examination of the position of the Christian in a Socialist society. Thirdly, the liberation of colonial peoples has led to the re-birth of non-European cultures and religions. These events have, he thinks, led to some purification of religion, history has caught up with it.

Of course the change is slow, It is reflected in the works and thoughts of Rudolf Bultmann, Pere Teilhard de Chardin and Bishop John Robinson. In their own ways they have attempted to remove much of the myth from Christianity and work out what is essential in it. They have, the author implies, attempted to isolate the timeless values of Christianity from the values that it has picked up in its history. Basically they adopt the attitude that Christianity reflects the age of its birth and it is expressed in the myths and philosophical structures of its time. As it developed it adopted other philosophical structures—such as Thomism. Because it was associated with the state after Constantine it acquired a social philosophy and function—the type of function which was removed in the USSR after the Revolution. The task at present is thus to bring Christianity into modern times, to integrate it into "the general trend of mankind". Then men can see what Christianity is. The marxist with his scientific conception of history can help the Christian immerse himself in a present which is not alien to him; by dialogue the Christian can gain knowledge of the nature of the world. To Garaudy, the Christian is blind if he does not see the value of dialogue.

Similarly he believes that marxism must change with the times and that Christianity can provide it with some of the motives for change. Marxism, like all scientific models, must be verified by experience. Recent years have shown that there is no true model of socialism which can be implemented without modification, just as there is no one model of Christianity. Marxism can become as alienated as Christianity if there is no self criticism. There is always a dialectic between relative and absolute truth in all such institutions, this leads to a plurality of forms.

Thus the anti-Christian Socialism of one time may not be the Socialism which suits another time. Christianity may have been a tool for the enslavement of man. However it may be a source of his advancement in the future. Garaudy believes therefore that marxists should be open and recognise the possibility and need for dialogue with Christians.

He is very enthusiastic about the long-range prospects of dialogue. Perhaps his most impressive thesis is that there are bases "for a common struggle by Communists and Catholics, for a noble rivalry between them in the human contest". Both have an idea of man which posits a better future for him in this world and both see the world as, in some way, the work of man. Both have a moral interest in the creation of a classless society because, as Gorki wrote: "It is Communists alone, which will create the true conditions of society in which love will cease to be a promise, or a moral law, and will become the objective law of the entire society". In many ways these words provide a summary of Garaudy's views and hopes.

These, then, are some of his main ideas. This is a difficult book to read simply because it is sometimes diffi-
cult to find a coherent theme. Garaudy seems to be concerned with presenting sketchily the main issues of the dialogue. He throws out many strands of argument and leaves the reader holding them. Some of his statements are excessively hopeful and utopian but they do provide thought for dialogue. One feels that he might have drawn some distinction between ideas and institutions. If this is a book dealing with the common bases of dialogue between marxist theorists and Christian theologians, then he should not confuse and interchange terms such as “Christian” and “Catholic”, “Communist” and “marxist”, without any apparent qualifications. Such flaws tend to leave gaps in his thesis which are hard to justify. Surely dialogue demands more than just a capacity to blur difficulties and distinctions.

Professor Garaudy's book is an interesting document illustrating some of the tendencies in contemporary Marxist-Christian dialogue. It is both optimistic and tentative. If the reader is expecting some sort of account of recent relationships between Christianity and marxism in their institutional forms he will be disappointed, this is a book for the theorist. Such an institutional account has yet to come.

T. Nash

FRENCH ASSESSMENTS


While most of the writers are critical of the work—some of them sharply so—it is notable that all pay unstinted tribute to Garaudy's work in the development of dialogue between marxists and Christians.

The following is the only substantial part of the whole discussion in which the question of dialogue crops up in connection with criticisms of 20th Century Marxism.

It occurs in the long essay written by Jean Kanapa. After accusing Garaudy of "a certain wavering between the requirements of relativism and the blandishments of eclecticism" in his discussion of the philosophical notion of concepts, Kanapa goes on: Many other pages of the work, notably those devoted to religion, would seem to call for similar observations.

To take an example touching on one of the most important questions: R. Garaudy rightly remarks that the historically unprecedented acceleration of the development of science and technique, and the very form of this development, "are leading many Christians to re-think their conception of the world". As a result, such Christians are endeavouring to "dissociate what is fundamental in their faith from the outdated conceptions of the world through which this faith has been traditionally expressed." From this R. Garaudy concludes: "Thus, there emerges more and more clearly a distinction between religion as ideology and world view, as the cultural form taken by religious belief at one or another stage of historical development, and religious belief itself".

If this statement refers to the attempt by certain Christians to dissociate, even to place in opposition one to another, their religious belief as they personally experience it, and the form of belief offered by their religion embodied as a church and a theology, then it is true. (This is actually one of the forms of the decay of the church in the socialist countries.)

But if it means that one is acknowledging the real possibility of a dis-
tinction between belief and religion, the statement can only be challenged. The dissociation made by Christians is not between religion and faith, but between a form and content of religious belief (offered to them by their church), and another form and content of religious belief (lived by them personally). It is a matter no less in one case than in the other of a belief which has ideological content and which bears the fundamental features of any religion. To postulate a faith devoid of all religious ideological content is arbitrarily to change the sense of words. And of concepts.

R. Garaudy seeks to justify himself, in another passage, by asserting that a marxist can understand what faith is as soon as he finds himself "at that point where he acknowledges that it is one and the same thing to acknowledge that the world makes sense and to hold oneself responsible for its meaning. Such an engagement of our entire being, theoretically and practically, is traditionally called faith". Now, it is at the very least difficult to accept that religious faith holds man "responsible" for the meaning of the world (a transcendent God plays this role). It is moreover clear that one never really thinks simply that the world "makes sense", but that it makes this or that sense (including the sense of making no sense at all). There is no "engagement" as such, but always engagement in action with this or that objective. The judgment one makes on the meaning of the world, the line of action one takes possesses therefore this or that ideological content. The Christian's belief carries within it an ideological content of a religious nature and this by definition. The engagement of the active communist carries within it a profoundly different conception of the world, of a non-religious nature. It is saying almost nothing to suggest an analogy between their own "faiths".

Likewise, when we read: "Just as it is said: the depth of faith, in a believer, depends on the strength of the atheist he carries within himself, we can also say the depth of humanity, in an atheist, depends on the strength of the believer he carries within himself". It is difficult indeed to accept as a fruit of dialectical reasoning this analogy which is redolent of the commonplace "everyone knows there is something of the atheist about the believer, and something of the believer about the marxist". This type of talk belongs to the "philosophy" of common sense, which certainly tends to reconcile contradictions but which, it must be said, takes no account whatever either of the ideological (scientific) content of marxism, or of the motivation of the marxist.

To take R. Garaudy's proposition literally one would have to conclude that the more the believer is a believer, the more he is an atheist; and that inversely the more the humanist is a humanist, the more of a believer he will be. The distortion here is not in the conclusion, but in the premises.

If, in connection with this formulation of R. Garaudy's, as with a number of others, one did not make allowance precisely for the formulation, one would be tempted to feel impatient at seeing real dialectical relationships reduced to a kind of exchange of civilities. The concern to understand others—and Garaudy devotes himself to this matter with a tenacity and a talent which command respect—ought not to lead to the casting off of one's own personality.

* "Faith . . . is the last thing communism needs for its application", wrote Marx and Engels in 1846 in the Circular Against Kriege. The authentic text of this document represents a source of interesting reflections on these questions.
AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW

SYDNEY EXPERIENCE

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW (No. 6, December 1967) made an important contribution with its series of articles under the heading, Marxist-Christian dialogue.

The late Dean of Canterbury in his book Christians and Communism, notes that Communists base themselves on the philosophy of 'dialectical materialism', and strongly challenges the view that Communists should be damned in the eyes of Christians because they are "materialistic."

This question of marxism's "materialistic" views came up in an evening dialogue with two Catholic priests, a Methodist clergyman and a number of young Christians and Communists in Sydney recently. One young Christian said somewhat challengingly, "Dialogue and co-operation is one thing but we cannot compromise on basic beliefs."

Nor do communists seek impossible ideological compromises. The fact must be squarely faced that marxism is based on a materialist standpoint. In dialogue it cannot be glossed over or conveniently ignored. But—as the plain speaking young Christian at our dialogue agreed—it can be calmly and sensibly discussed while at the same time it need not and should not be made an all exclusive focal point posed against dialogue and possible co-operation around wide areas of potential agreement, affecting the peace, security and moral advancement of man.

Together with a positive approach on points of potential unity, marxism, clearly states its basic differences with religion. As Marx and Engels showed (and modern marxists affirm) religion holds the view that man is governed by supernatural forces beyond his control. Marxism, however, holds that there are no independent entities existing outside of space and time.

Marxism fully recognises the existence and important role of the mind, or in other words, the spirit of man. It sees matter as primary and spiritual qualities as related to, and derived from, the material—in turn reflecting back upon and influencing the material.

 briefly, these are the differences. but an important facet of the marxist approach is that, at all stages, it has stood for unity for the brotherhood and advancement of all people regardless of religion or race.

Another important aspect is that marxism has always noted the inherent positive content of Christianity. It has noted that while institutionalised religion has sought to uphold the Establishment, to sanctify and protect the rights of the privileged against the people there is also the opposite tendency in which the humanist base of religious teaching is deeply concerned with the rights of people, with the welfare of man.

Engels makes this clear in his essay entitled On the History of Early Christianity. It included this pertinent passage:

"The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people; it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of people subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society. Both are persecuted and baited, their adherents are despised and made the objects of exclusive laws, the former as enemies
of the human race, the latter as enemies of the state, enemies of religion, the family, social order. And in spite of all persecution, nay, even spurred on by it, they forge victoriously, irresistibly ahead. Three hundred years after its appearance Christianity was the recognised state religion in the Roman World Empire, and in barely sixty years socialism has won itself a position which makes its victory absolutely certain."

And what of the full context of the "opium" reference? This quote is from Marx's essay of 1844—Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. With the prospect of expanding the dialogue process it is perhaps useful to put the full context of the two relevant passages on record.

"Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

"The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion."

Thus, study in context shows that in the very sector containing the "opium" reference, Marx also shows that "protest against real distress" is an important other aspect of religion.

It is true that there have been distortions in the practical and theoretical work of the world labor movement since Marx and Engels first wrote on the marxist attitude to religion a century ago. These need to be faced, combated and eradicated.

But it is also true that responsibility for this problem does not rest with marxists alone. At periods in history, including relatively recent history, the predominant role of Church has frequently been to serve as a bulwark to reaction while the other aspect, the protest potential of Christianity has been almost entirely muted.

This contradiction remains today. But the most essential thing is that the positive, protest aspect is on the rise.

In America, Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis and Protestant ministers have been in the fore of marches and demonstrations for the cause of Negro freedom. They have faced racist violence and murder and stayed in the fight. Similarly, the moral issues involved in the wholesale murder of Vietnamese men, women and children have seen followers and leaders of the Church vigorously in the foreground.

In Australia, too, church leaders and followers are increasingly active in different sectors of the peace and progressive movements.

The changes within the Catholic Church are particularly noteworthy. There has been the famous Pacem in Terris of Pope John XXIII. There has been the marked degree of change in the Church's social doctrines from Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum ("New Things"), the quite conservative encyclical of 1891, to the comparatively liberal Populorum Progressio ("Advance of man" or "Progress of the Peoples") encyclical issued by Pope Paul in 1967. (For an informative essay on this subject—see The Encyclical 'Populorum Progressio by Libero Pierantozzi, Peace, Freedom and Socialism, No. 6, 1967.)
For too long in Australia there have tended to be divisions among the Australian people on religious grounds. These have been fanned by extremists on both sides. They have played quite a serious part in holding back the potential and need for unity in the labor movement, the peace and progressive movements of the Australian people generally.

Such divisions do not benefit the ordinary people. They benefit the forces of privilege against the people. They impede the interests of peace and accelerate the already dangerous rapid world drift towards nuclear calamity. They hold back the rich possibilities for social, cultural and moral advance.

If the process of dialogue can assist to overcome these divisions; to make it more difficult for extremists to set Christian against Communist; to set religious unionists or peace workers against the materialist left winger, it will have performed a practical service of far reaching importance.

The marxist attitude is clearly that the “believer” and the “non-believer” can find common ground for advancement of man.

Indeed, room for such co-operation exists within the Communist Party itself. Italy provides a striking example. Approximately two million Italians are members of the Communist Party yet, according to a 1963 estimate of Palmiro Togliatti, the late general secretary of the Italian Party, “probably the majority of the total number of members are believers.”

Joint action and association between believer and non-believer for such objectives as peace and economic security can clearly be achieved without demanding, (or pretending to achieve) unreal compromise between the basic materialist philosophy of marxism and the spiritual stand of Christianity.

It simply means joint readiness to seek more realistic attitudes that place appropriate emphasis on mutual search for paths to serve both man’s immediate moral and material needs and to help guarantee fulfilment of his ultimate destiny in a world seriously threatened with nuclear extinction.

For their part, there is growing evidence that Australian marxists are prepared to adopt a flexible readiness to listen and learn from other people’s ideas free from dogmatic and sectarian attitudes. What degree of success can be achieved remains to be tested in further development of Australian dialogue.

W. J. BROWN

NOT THAT HE NEEDS DEFENDING

IT IS understandable that the academics of literature, history, anthropology and folklore should either denigrate the work of Robert Graves or try to hush it up. That anyone not similarly tethered to the job of preserving things as they are should do the same is unaccountable except on the grounds of ignorance.

Graves is no johnny-come-lately. He has produced a hundred books in fifty years, all of very high standard and all uncommonly diverse. Poems, translations and lectures on poetry; autobiography; plays, short stories and essays; history and historical novels; studies in anthropology and mythology; satires; science-fiction; criminology; a collection of folk-ballads; a highly original opera-libretto. The diversity is astonishing, and the high standard is indisputable.

Name Graves, and at once the military historian thinks of his Lawrence and the Arabs; the murder-fancier thinks of They Hanged My Saintly
Billy; the old soldier thinks with gratitude of Goodbye To All That; and probably the philatelist thinks of Antigua Penny Puce. To every reader, his own aspect of Graves; but Graves thinks of himself as a poet, and that is both fundamental and fundamentally right. It is the mind of a poet that informs and unifies this vast and varied output—the mind of a man to whom beauty is inseparable from truth.

Truth is a slippery word. One can speak of scientific truths, moral truths, truth meaning fidelity, truth to one’s word, and the meaning alters a little bit each time the context changes. But it is the poet’s job to wrestle with this slippery Thetis until she relents and melts into human shape to become the mother of immortal children.

Graves in prose is concerned with establishing or re-establishing historical truths about, for instance, Milton, matriarchy, mushrooms, or the War of American Independence. This has made him a thorn in the pillow of those who prefer sanctified lies.

Graves in verse is still more deeply concerned with emotional truth, truth-to-experience. He avoids tub-thumbing, tear-jerking and affectation as fastidiously as a cat avoids mud. Some readers find his verse “dry”, and I think he would not resent the epithet. A good Hock or an Amontillado is dry in the same sense: not adulterated with glucose or treacle.

At present he is being quite widely misrepresented as having said that poetry is, or should be, written only for poets. What he actually did say, in the preface to Poems 1938-1945, was: “I write poems for poets, and satires and grotesques for wits; for people in general I write prose.” There is quite a difference between “Poetry is...” or “Poetry should be...” and “I write...”

The actual statement makes good sense on several different planes of meaning. His poetry is “for poets” in the sense that it will pass the strictest professional inspection for honesty, clarity, brevity and technical skill. He makes no attempt to please Church or State, moralists, recruiting-sergeants or policemen. T. S. Eliot may write platitudes for parsons, Ezra Pound may write filth for fascists, Dylan Thomas may stack on his thunderous double-talk act to impress innocents and simpletons; but Graves writes poems for poets.

The people who are indignant at the notion of Graves writing for poets are presumably under the impression that poets write, or should write, “for everybody.” But this has never been possible; and it is less than ever possible in a sharply-stratified class society. Most living Australian poets would be horrified at the notion of writing for Menzies or Brigadier Spry. Burns certainly did not write for the unco guid. Paterson deliberately ignored the fashionable literary circles of Sydney in his day. And in writing “for poets” Graves is clearly not writing for the Pound-worshippers, the beatniks, the Thomas-fanciers or even the Catholic poets of today.

Graves has in fact given a much less elliptical definition of his audience, and of any poet’s audience, in the fifth of his Clarke lectures, 1954-55. He defines it as “the widest possible extension of the circle of the poet’s potential friends.” And he adds the warning that a poet who tries to win a larger public than this by writing down to it is guilty of professional misconduct.

It seems strange to me that people should have made more fuss about this merely verbal crux than about the fact that he wrote The White Goddess. In this startling book, a prose work written with a poet’s insight,
Graves re-establishes the truths that Lewis Morgan and Federick Engels discovered about matriarchy and primitive communism. He has dispersed the conspiracy of silence in which academic anthropologists have long buried the question, and started a thoroughly enjoyable and lively fight over it.

It would be a waste of time to wonder whether my enjoyment of Graves' poems springs from my being a poet or from being a potential friend of the poet. I am far more absorbed and enlivened by his beautifully documented demonstration that every genuine poet has the right and the duty to declare himself an enemy both of God and of Mammon.

JOHN MANIFOLD

TOWN PLANNING?

The publication of Organisation for Strategic Planning by the Town and Country Planning Board of Victoria, The Future Growth of Melbourne by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and Sydney Region Growth & Change Prelude to a Plan by the State Planning Authority of New South Wales drew this comment.

URBAN PLANNING, in the post war years, has failed miserably to meet the urgent problems of the cities, especially population growth, industrial development, and the ever-growing motor traffic.

Planning authorities in Melbourne and Sydney, in an effort to find a solution to this problem, have recently advanced new proposals.

In Melbourne the Minister for Local Government called upon the Town and Country Planning Board to prepare a review of planning policy for the Melbourne region. The Board had recently acquired the services of a passed-over planner from Sydney but even so could hardly be regarded as an organisation renowned for energy, initiative or ideas. It had plodded on for years producing meaningless little plans, conducting no research or analyses of Victoria's urban problems. This request for a sweeping review of the planning of the Melbourne region was, however, an opportunity to comment on an area out of the Board's ken and firmly in the field of its competitor—the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works.

The Minister did the "right thing" and sent a copy of the invitation to the Board of Works inviting their views on the matter. Both organisations set about preparing reports. A competition ensued to see which would get in first. The Board of Works won the race but their report probably suffered as a result. Not that the Town and Country Planning Board could claim much kudos because most of their report is the work of a private consulting organisation, reflecting effectively the poverty of resources committed to planning in Victoria. Neither organisation has anything which resembles a research section and both are short of trained analysts such as economists, statisticians, political scientists and so on.

In New South Wales the State Planning Authority engaged in a long overdue re-examination of the problems of the Sydney region, prodded into it, no doubt, by the Minister for Local Government who is notoriously "anti-planning". The Minister's cynicism is well placed because the Planning Authority has little to show for the three and a half years of its existence, except perhaps an unenviable record of high staff turnover and wastage among its professional level officers. As a public relations exercise the Authority has produced a document entitled Prelude to a Plan which is claimed to be a discussion
of the problems facing the Sydney region and of “strategic planning” as a process.

All three reports are interesting because they begin by spelling out the magnitude of the population growth in Sydney and Melbourne expected by the turn of the century. However, there is little attempt to translate these projected population levels into meaningful figures, and in none of the reports are any planning objectives discussed save in extremely vague terms.

The Future Growth of Melbourne is an uncritical assessment of the activities of the Board of Works over the past decade or so. It effectively says “all we need to do is have more control over a larger area and everything will be all right.”

The report contains a series of plans purporting to indicate possible forms of growth. No supporting economic or operational analyses are presented and it is fair to conclude that none were conducted.

Similarly Prelude to a Plan gives no indication of what the future planning process and goals might or should be. It flies no kites and evades discussion of all the main issues which have thwarted planning in Sydney for so long. It does give a “pot pourri” of information, much of it interesting but irrelevant. In discussing recreation and open space no reference is made to the “Green Belt” which was such a critical part of the County of Cumberland Planning Scheme. Is this because the concept is now passe or is it because so little of it remains? Do the releases in 1966 and 1967 presage its complete abolition? Some of the illustrations are superb and the presentation of the material is very good; it is a pity that the content does not reach the same standard.

Nowhere in either of these reports is there any discussion of the ways in which urban investment by all the government agencies should or could be integrated.

On the other hand Organisation for Strategic Planning appears to be a more useful, though limited, contribution to the discussion of planning problems in Melbourne.

Given that the report presumes that urban areas are constantly in a state of flux, it is difficult to understand why it is assumed that the existing central area must have its dominance defended at all costs. One wonders too whether the current drought in Melbourne will mean anything in terms of the availability of water for future population growth. The second half of the report is a useful summary of a proposed planning process but one wonders whether its political implications have been worked out.

The organisations producing these reports have no reason to feel smug and complacent. They have barely begun their tasks. They need to reassess their attitudes to the public. One hopes that the public interest in these reports will generate an awareness of the political nature of the planning process. We need to encourage planning organisations to keep the public informed, to take a positive lead in advising the public so that the necessary political support may be generated for their plans.

RONALD STACEY

TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSPORT WORKERS

TRANSPORT plays a most important role in the development of the country and its industries.

In this age of technological change, ship owners, transport companies, railways commissioners, harbor trust
experts, engineering companies and government representatives are making big changes in the Australian transport system. In view of the fact that these changes are already seriously affecting transport workers, the question arises: what are we in the unions going to do about it in the common interest of all workers in the transport industry?

It's true the task is not easy. A lot of trade union conservatism will have to go. Some officials will have to get down off their high horses, and their responsibility to the working class will be put to the test.

Changes on the wharf and in the railways are of particular interest. Mechanisation and container transport is estimated to cut the membership of the Waterside Workers' Federation from about 20,000 odd today to 8,000 within the next ten years.

In the railway service, in spite of the starvation of funds by the government, many changes have taken place or are in the process. Diesels began to replace steam locomotives about 1949 and by 1965 two and a half million more train miles per year were being run with 133 fewer locos. This means 266 fewer crew members and all that goes to keep a loco on the road. As dieselisation develops, the district loco shed disappears, taking with it the whole of the loco maintenance staff, office employees and others.

The opening of the standard gauge line saw the introduction of the centralised traffic control, which wiped out many signalmen's jobs and other safe-working positions in the north-east of Victoria. This system is now being extended across the Overland route and consequently many more jobs will be lost.

In the western district the system of staff exchange that operates has enabled the department to eliminate many safe-working jobs. Many Assistant Stationmaster's and Stationmaster's positions have been abolished. Flashing light and boom barrier installations have meant the loss of job opportunities for track workers broken down in health or suffering permanent injuries.

Mechanisation of resleepering, along with the development of the cyclic system of maintenance of the tracks will cut the track force in half. Instead of an average of one man for every three miles of track, there will be one man for every six miles.

The Hump marshalling yard at North Melbourne, which is being built at an estimated cost of $9 million, will eliminate a great number of jobs such as yard foremen, shunters, pilots, signalmen, number takers, point cleaners, etc., and will break up and marshal trains in less than half the time now required.

The computer installed at the Railways Administrative Offices is not there to make life easier—it is there to cut out work opportunities for the white collar worker—and this is precisely what it does.

The effect of change in the Railways Workshops has been a little less dramatic, but the future will be no less drastic. Steel processed rolling stock is being superseded by aluminium because new processing methods have increased the efficiency of this type of material, particularly for bulk haulage.

When a worker is displaced by new methods of production, there is a tremendous gain for the employer, whether government or capitalist. The savings are his weekly wage, annual leave, long service leave, sick pay, liability as a workers' compensation case, retiring gratuity, superannuation contribution and the various fringe
benefits that have been won from time to time.

I have dealt with the railways in a little more detail because this is the industry I know best. We are facing a revolution in transport and we need a revolutionary approach to these problems that life is forcing upon us. The complexity of the union set-up involved and the rapid changes taking place demand immediate action.

Within the short space of ten years, workers in the transport industry could be cut by half. These changes taking place in a new industrial world demand that the trade union movement as a whole develop a new and modern concept of working class unity. I firmly believe the most important task that faces transport workers is the formation of one big transport union in which we will have both unity and strength.

L. LOYE

WELFARE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

I am writing to you on behalf of the Communications Committee, one of the bodies concerned with preparations for a Conference being organised by the Australian Council of Social Service, to be held from 19th to 24th May, 1968. The title of this Conference is “The Welfare of Ethnic Minorities”, and the Conference venue is the University of Queensland.

It is felt by the organisers of the Conference that this subject will interest many sections of the Australian community, and that as many people as possible should be advised of the details of the Conference.

Would it be possible, in the near future, for details concerning the subject, venue, and time of the Conference to be published in your Journal?

Yours sincerely,

(Miss) L. Macdonald,
Box 1088 N, G.P.O., Brisbane, 4001.

Australian Marxist Research Foundation

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

Applications are invited by this new Foundation for the position of Research Director. The Foundation is presently establishing a centre in Sydney and the initial functions of the Research Director will be to work under the supervision of the Board to collate available national and international material of interest to the Foundation, plan symposia and lectures, prepare the publication of a newsletter and plan research programs for scholarships which will be made available by the Foundation.

Applicants should be interested in the labor and socialist movements and familiarity with library and research techniques would be valuable. Academic qualifications are desirable but not essential.

Salary will be by negotiation.

Applications giving full personal particulars, details of education and experience to be submitted to the Board Chairman, Australian Marxist Research Foundation, c/- Box A247, Sydney South Post Office, Sydney, 2000.

Applications close 1st March, 1968.