Dr. Davidson’s book, which is in fact a fusion of his own ideas with the Italian philosopher Gramsci, will make interesting reading for most communists and those of the left who are genuinely interested in radical social change. It will be appreciated by many rank and file communists, in particular, as the first real work to give a guide to the Italian style marxism and the patient orientation towards it by the Communist Party of Australia. It will certainly provoke considerable discussion — this is its most positive value — among the left generally where such ideas have considerable support.

Many long-established views and principles of marxist thinking are challenged, so much so that Dr. Davidson is not sure whether Gramsci should in fact be called a marxist. In his conclusion while comparing Gramsci with Marcuse he says “It could be maintained that both men revised marxism too much to allow them to be called marxist.” The book from beginning to end challenges one marxist principle after another. Very early he discards one of the fundamentally accepted principles — that of the transition of capitalism to socialism due to the laws of development operating in society (p. 25):

What explains why Engels gave this interpretation to Marx and why Marx himself so often seemed to favor such conceptions of his theory, was that they themselves were victims of the ruling vogue of positivism and materialism. They too tended to see historical materialism through the prisms of contemporary philosophical theory. Gramsci simply dismissed such interpretations as historically determined and therefore unacceptable accretions to Marx’s theory which should be disregarded in understanding Marx. This, incidentally was how he coped with the problem that Engels had some authority for his philosophy in the writings of Marx. He simply said that any crude materialist and positivist sections of Marx were the dross of marxist theory and not to be regarded as authoritative. Everything Marx wrote, according to Gramsci, had to be seen in the context of the time it was written and then any sections of the theory which stemmed from Marx’s historically determined ontology had to be eliminated.

And from here on, apparently, all revision of marxist theory can be explained as being in a different historical period — true enough if the revision can be substantiated but in few places does a strong argument appear, merely a stating of a new position.

A. D. gives full support, and even goes a little further, to Gramsci’s subordination of the working class, in the revolutionary
movement and in this he courageously pulls no punches when he says (p 41): "It is going to be difficult for the worker who believes or has had it dinned into his head that he is as good as everybody else and that the labor movement is his movement, to swallow views which so deprecate him and his potential for leadership."

The question of the relationship between intellectuals and the working class in the revolutionary movement is one which has been steadily rising to the fore over the last decade. It is inevitable that it be argued out. Regrettably the question is often posed Gramsci-Davidson style as one of workers versus intellectuals for the leadership of the movement when in fact they are integral parts dependent on each other. A.D., again perhaps courageously, but unfortunately displaying a particular contempt and distrust of the Australian working class, says (p 42): "Australians faced with the fact that the Australian worker is the worst enemy of socialism, in many if not most cases. . . ."

It seems to me that Gramsci became disillusioned with the revolutionary potential of the working class as the main force following the failure of the Italian left to succeed in gaining power in what appeared to be a revolutionary situation in Italy in the period after the 1914-18 war. The left was not sufficiently developed or organised to cope with the revolutionary situation as so many other European parties at that time were not.

The New Left of today suffers from a similar disillusionment. The objective circumstances of the post-war years have been conditions for a growth in left thinking. The conditions are basically the growth of monopoly and the aggressive nature of imperialism exemplified by the war in Vietnam. The birth of the New Left and the widespread discontent with monopoly — so far insufficiently harnessed — are due mainly to experience alone and lack a united revolutionary theory. Both Gramsci and Davidson err when they almost completely ignore economic factors, despite Gramsci's belief that Marx' Capital is the most important source for the reconstruction of marxism, in favor of ideology. Economic factors can provide fertile ground for developing the ideological process. The disunity within the world communist parties and the serious errors in some socialist countries have added to the difficulties of the communist parties in the developed western countries and their inability to make use of conditions providing immense opportunities to unite and provide the necessary leadership to the forces of the left including the New Left and the working class generally.

A.D. poses the question: "What is marxism anyway?" This question is certainly begging an answer today. And along with it a number of other questions: "What is a marxist?" — that so many people of diverse opinions are called marxists surely makes a
definition seem necessary, if indeed such is possible. What, in this technological age, constitutes the working class needs answering. In light of A.D.’s and Gramsci’s views on the role of intellectuals we must ask, “What is an intellectual?” There could be some red faces here, because although Gramsci appears to consider the university-trained as fitting this category there are many university trained in the field of humanities who do not regard people in such fields as medicine, engineering, etc., as anything but skilled tradesmen.

The views of Gramsci are presented by A.D. as original; where they correspond to those of Lenin they are presented as having been arrived at independently — A.D. places great importance on this independence. On the other hand so many views, in fact almost all, run so contrary to those of Lenin that A.D. seems to avoid the comparison perhaps for fear of, or lack of confidence in, tackling leninism.

The section on “Gramsci the Man” will be for the vast majority of readers new material, as little is known of his works and even less of his life. It will be of interest both from the historical and human points of view. Gramsci’s difficult life of sacrifice will certainly win him sympathy. His deformity due to a childhood accident, his courageous struggle for an education, his years in a fascist jail and his eventual death as a result, and his devotion to truth through all this will win him friends. However, his political career full of vacillation and uncertainty as it was ranging from near-fascist support to extreme leftism — and back to the “right” is not so inspiring.

His ideas and views contain little that is new, simply a variation on old themes thrashed out many times in one form or another since the end of the last century. That they should come to the fore in the ideological confusion, frustration and fragmentation of the left today is understandable. That they will for a time gain considerable support with a section of the Left that has a fetish desire to cast out all of the past, including the good with the bad, is equally understandable.

Dan O’Neill is a lecturer in the English department of the University of Queensland:

I read very little Italian, and Gramsci was not much more than a name to me before I read Alastair Davidson’s very interesting book. So I cannot undertake to criticise the presentation offered by the author, except perhaps to say that the section entitled “Gramsci the Man” is misnamed. It is far better at giving historical and organisational background than at making Gramsci live
Davidson's emphasis throughout, quite properly, is on the ideas and their relevance, and it is about these that comment and debate is needed here. The mature Gramsci's central position in his revision of the concept of power. Pre-revolutionary Russia was a special case when the apparatus of governmental rule was more viable, coherent and entrenched than the civil society whose expression it pretended to be. In more advanced capitalist societies the status quo reposes far more squarely on the "consensus" of civil society. When force is used by the state against challengers it can usually appeal to the moral, social and political consciousness of "all classes" of civil society to justify itself. Capitalism goes on functioning not because it coerces people but because it exercises in Gramsci's phrase "hegemony", a suasive force over the whole society. Or to put it into class terms, the dominant class rules more by intellectual mystification of the objective social realities, more by moral sway over the working class than by repression. Their class interests are made to seem the obvious communal interest, their world-view the obvious unbiased perception of the nature of man, society, and the world. The best summary of hegemony I have read is that of Gwyn Williams:

an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations.

Out of this analysis flows Gramsci's view of the function of the party. With its core of socialist intellectuals it proposes a completely alternative world-view, it secures a socialist counter-hegemony through the capture of individual minds and opinion-forming institutions and its installation in power is merely the registration in formal terms of the victory gradually won "on the cultural front".

Gramsci's theory ought to encourage the very welcome change in emphasis by Australian marxists. It uses class categories in a way so sophisticated as to make them crack under the strain. What are capitalist values? Can the world rule be used so confidently of the processes of lazy custom-mongering, self-deception and rationalised self interest that go to make up so much of Australian ideology making? What are the real institutional, personal, and intellectual cum moral relationships between the different kinds of powerful groups in Australia? Its remnants of dogmatism (and it certainly has them) are so little offensive to non-marxists that it will encourage exchanges of insight and the
common exploration of empirical questions about institutional power-relationships and their effects on individual consciousness. It will certainly lead many marxists to envisage forms of action not readily assimilable to a simple class-formulation. In other words, Grasmcian theory may be just what is needed to legitimate for the "old" Left the sort of preoccupation with radical institutional change that has been almost instinctive with the "new" Left.

I doubt that Gramsci, any more than Marcuse, will convince younger radicals of the necessity of marxism as anything more than a contributory tradition, one perspective along with others, for the unravelling of the present situation that confronts revolutionary thinking. In fact many of the lessons to be learned from his view of hegemony and his relatively open and socio-cultural version of the party have already been absorbed from thinkers like Raymond Williams and his disciples and from the theory that emerged from practice in the American and European student movements. To go further, it can be urged that a careful reading of these sources might actually disenchant an ardent Marxist-Gramscist with the feasibility of quas-manipulative concepts like that of "the masses" (see in particular the concluding section of Williams' *Culture and Society*) and the method of creating worker-intellectuals by didacticism.

It seems to me that the main significance of Gramsci will lie in his posing the traditional view of revolution in its most sophisticated form. The question can be raised whether Gramsci's key conceptualisation of the socialist movement as that of counter-hegemony against bourgeois hegemony is not the last of the subtly capitalist-dominated, oppositionally defensive and manipulative views of the revolution. That the question can be asked is not without irony, given his own view of the trade union movement and the Italian Socialist Party as "capitalist" bodies, but I put it forward seriously, not provocatively. It will probably become, in Gramscian terms or not, the real issue of debate as dialectic accelerates on the Australian Left, and the real difficulties of human liberation are made unavoidably clear, including: how to liberate the liberators?

Roger Milliss is a journalist on the staff of Tribune, and President of Sydney New Theatre:

DR. DAVIDSON'S BOOK is something of a landmark in the history of marxist scholarship in this country, raising it to a new level and giving it a new dimension. This in itself, regrettably, is not to say much. Marxist scholarship in Australia has hitherto
been distinguished by its non-existence, or at best its tawdriness. More than any other country in the western world, Australia has lacked the intellectual tradition from which a complete socialist body of theory might arise, and socialism has had to be injected artificially and almost painfully into the working class movement.

In his study of Gramsci, Dr. Davidson has provided more than a starting point along that arduous but very necessary path, as well as placing before us a succinct introductory outline of the thinking of a man of exceptional relevance to the socialist movement at the present time. It is more than ten years since Gramsci's writings, in the form of Louis Marks' *The Modern Prince*, first became available in Australia, but even then they failed to be accorded their full due, being largely greeted with suspicion and disdain in entrenched circles of the Left. Even those of us who read him at that time did not grasp his full significance, seeing in his ideas merely a liberal voice which acknowledged the importance of intellectuals at a time when, in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and Hungary, anti-intellectualism in the Communist Party was at its height, rather than a theory the essence of which had direct practical application to the Australian situation. Now Dr. Davidson a decade later has righted things — and fortunately not too late.

By way of qualification, however, let me say that I am not convinced by Dr. Davidson's espousal of the fashionable anti-Engels school of thought which postulates an essential division between the creator Marx and his populariser-collaborator, and ascribes to Engels a vulgar mechanism lacking in the master's works. Dr. Davidson, unfortunately, does not produce textual proof from Gramsci's writings to indicate that in attacking vulgar marxism Gramsci was in fact attacking "Engelianism"; this may in fact be so, but evidence is lacking. As if to prove the contrary, in one of the appendices of actual extracts included by Dr. Davidson, Gramsci pays Engels a less than oblique compliment in stating the need for an all-round appreciation of Benedetto Croce: "On the work of such a nature, an *Anti-Croce*, which, in the modern cultural environment, could have the significance and importance that the *Anti-Dühring* had for the generation before the (first) world war, it would be worthwhile for a whole group of men to spend ten years." (p. 64).

But these are only minor points of criticism which do not detract from the great importance of Dr. Davidson's work, which I think is at least twofold: firstly, his emphasis on Gramsci's concept of hegemony and secondly, his treatment of the significance Gramsci attached to the role of intellectuals in forming the socialist consciousness of the working class.
In this grotesque ad-mass, big-sell, automative age, Gramsci's view that social transformation will occur only when the masses come to accept a rival system of values and ideas to that through which the ruling class maintains its total dominance, or "hegemony", is of greater relevance than when Gramsci first advanced it over 30 years ago. In the past, of course, such a rival system was advanced and propagated, and during the depression and the immediate post-war period did grip large sections of the working class, but it was largely in terms of an overseas model. Economic problems confronting the Australian people were solved by reference to the Soviet Union, Australian democracy was contrasted unfavorably with political practice in the socialist countries, and the imminent collapse of the capitalist system was constantly predicted. But capitalism didn't collapse: it stabilised itself, the standard of living rose and we suddenly discovered that those concentration camps were a much more real phenomenon than anyone ever imagined.

Today we are faced with the peculiar paradox of an Australia with an unprecedentedly high standard of living, for the winning of which the Communist Party was at least partly responsible, through its leadership of the great post-war strikes, but in which the overall political influence of the Communist Party is minimal. Compared with 80 per cent. of the world's population, Australians live like kings, and yet — as elsewhere in the advanced capitalist lands — human happiness is no nearer, alienation is greater and the prevailing ethos is one of futility and emptiness. After years of selfless battling by thousands of dedicated communists, class consciousness seems at its lowest ebb: the capitalist system of values seems to have finally gained hegemony over the working class. Yet for all that, the potential appeal of socialism is as great as ever, but only if it takes fully into account actual Australian conditions, the realities of present-day economic standards and the nation's social and political traditions — in short, if, in Gramsci's terms, it can present an alternative and viable system of values which will challenge the capitalist hegemony not only on the economic level but also the moral and ethical, offering a fundamentally better way of living than that offered by capitalism.

It would be unfortunate, to say the least, if Gramsci's emphasis on the importance of winning intellectuals to the socialist movement and of the intellectuals' role in fostering socialist consciousness among the working class were to be misunderstood as containing elitist overtones. This emphasis results from the significance he attaches to ideas as the main element in influencing men to opt for revolutionary change and his belief that adverse material circumstances alone are not enough for them to do this. It has long been acknowledged by marxists that the main feature of the
labor movement in Australia has been its economism — that is, its concentration on economic issues rather than political or ideological questions. It is also recognised that generally socialist ideas have not developed spontaneously among the working class, but have been introduced to it from outside, in most cases by "traditional" intellectuals: Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Labriola, Togliatti and Gramsci himself are only a few of the numerous examples that might be quoted.

In this age of the sometimes seemingly irreconcilable polarisation of society into the (admittedly increasing) culturally privileged minority and the underprivileged majority, the expansion and sophistication of technology have made advanced knowledge the virtual monopoly of trained specialists as those who formulate, assimilate and disseminate the dominant ideas of society; if they can be won to a socialist position, then they are capable of providing the alternative system of ideas the socialist movement needs to challenge the capitalist hegemony and which can be siphoned down to — and fed back from — the masses through the elaborate layers of the "organic party" he envisages. The development of the student revolt through the phases of protest and radicalism to a stage where it is searching for an alternative to capitalist society is some measure of the possibility of this happening in Australia today.

Thirty years after his death, then, Gramsci's ideas take on new meaning. As he himself did with other thinkers, whether Marx or Croce, we need to seek in his writings for the essence of his thought, using only what is relevant to ourselves and our times and discarding what is superfluous or irrelevant. He emerges, if not as a man for all seasons, as very much a man for this one now. Dr. Davidson has performed an invaluable service in bringing him so forcibly and vividly to our attention.