
BRUCE McFARLANE has written an extremely stimulating book which is a critique of the way the modern Australian economy is run. It is simultaneously an attempt to present some ideas for economic reforms, both short-term and long-term.

Criticisms of the existing economic set-up, and proposals for changes are connected — yet they are not the same. There is many a trenchant critic who has little to offer in the way of alternatives. These twin aims of the book are achieved in quite different ways. The critique of the management of our economic affairs is highly successful; the solutions offered — "the case for reform" — is less so, yet by no means less significant.

The book is a criticism of Australian capitalism in detail. It is refreshing to see a serious analysis of some of the main aspects of Australian capitalism as it exists and operates in the 'sixties, instead of the abstract criticism of capitalism as such, or an arbitrary selection of this or that facet, such as many of the Left have been prone to make.

McFarlane shows the inefficiencies, the mismanagement of the economy, the influence of pressure groups, the response of the government to these pressure groups, and the extent to which it is their captive. All this is done convincingly in the areas examined.

The Australian economy is shown to have a higher degree of monopoly than perhaps any country in the world. Big corporations have a far-reaching influence on the economy and on the way in which it operates. The drift, he says, "is in the direction of more highly centralised decision-making within capitalist corporations and government agencies." This criticism is directed against what he calls the hydra-head system of "regulation" of the economy.

This consists of a whole number of boards, commissions, tribunals, various government departments pulling in different directions, the Treasury, six State governments and various ad hoc bodies established in response to pressure from vested interests or to deal with particular problems. All this has been established in a piecemeal fashion.

"The main criticism that has been made against this system is that it confuses 'regulation' with 'planning', fails to make the various agencies of regulation work towards common objectives..." This system has come into being as a result of the specific conditions of the development of capitalism in Australia and under the influence of big business pressure groups and a network of bureaucratic regulation agencies.

Certainly there is "planning" of a kind in Australia, as there is in all modern societies. The question is what sort of planning and planning by whom and in whose interest? "Planning" in Australia takes place under the influence of "concentrated economic power, involving control of large resources and also of large areas of the economy." But it is also inefficient, piecemeal planning, based on outdated ideas and outmoded techniques.

McFarlane, the economist, is irritated by these "unnecessary" inefficiencies. He sees possible, even obvious solutions. He calls for a national Planning...
Ministry” with a view of the overall economy and how its sectors could be dovetailed. . . This is an indispensable technique for exploring, in systematic fashion, the range of possible economic policies and strategies. . .”

He contrasts the situation in Australia with that of other Western countries, where planning is better organised, and more efficiently coordinated. Here we deal with the competent technical man, the economist who looks for reason and order, for “optimal development”, who is irritated by anything that cuts across it and who proposes perfectly rational (technically) measures to overcome these obstacles. At other times the marxist theorist comes to the fore. At such moments we find McFarlane talking about “reducing the significance of the business men” and about “undemocratic control of planning caused by monopoly power and bureaucratic regulation.”

On these questions of economic reform in our society McFarlane is less clear. He is grappling with the problem of how to transcend the existing economic system. This is not simply a matter of presenting some alternative but of attempting to develop within the framework of the existing system some institutions which will provide a lever for action to change the system itself. On these matters some of his views and proposals will be questioned. He has some interesting and creative ideas on the problem of the state in our modern capitalist society.

His thinking on the problems of a socialist economy for the Australia of the future is strongly influenced by the experiences of the socialist countries. His projections are an attempt to overcome the inherent weaknesses of the modern capitalist economy without exchanging it for the bureaucratic control and centralised domination in evidence in the socialist countries.

Certainly he does not say the last word on these questions. But to pose these problems seriously for discussion, to deal with the real difficulties that socialists must face up to unless they are content to have their heads buried in the sand — for doing this Bruce McFarlane deserves full credit. This is a very courageous attempt to come to terms with a problem which has been overlaid with dogmatic strictures and with reformist illusions. It is a very useful corrective to many of the ingrained doctrinaire views which permeate the labor movement. This gives the book its particular value.

Bernie Taft


IN HIS FIRST THREE novels Thomas Keneally showed himself to be a deft and very able writer, but while he ostensibly gives a damn about the big issues of life and literature however soul-wrenching they may be, he remains an author without a centre. This is shown particularly strongly in the manner in which his novels introduce characters and themes quite tellingly, and in almost obsessively social terms, but fail to develop either at all well. As a consequence even the much overpraised Bring Larks and Heroes is essentially sequential, and Halloran, that novel’s central figure, is not shown to develop in a manner at all commensurate with his action as related. In each of the first three novels Keneally’s calculatedly rough-edged style is highly evocative but eventually only of elusiveness itself and half-truths half explored.

Three Cheers for the Paraclete is a very different work in that its theme, the Roman Catholic church in Aus-
Australia, is explicit rather than an abstract and Keneally has polished his style smooth enough to attempt, in what he has called "my last Catholic novel," an ecclesiastical Lucky Jim — funny and episodic but with highly serious objectives nonetheless. Of these intended characteristics the book is most obviously episodic.

As protagonist, Father Maitland is a new breed and slightly trendy priest who has published pseudonymously and without his Bishop's imprimatur, while in France, a history of man's ideas of God. Back in Australia, Maitland survives a series of mishaps — clashes with reactionary superiors and impotent but strongly felt involvements with fellow priests' spiritual and worldly crises — till the authorship of The Meanings of Cod is discovered and he is suspended from priestly duties for three months.

With material enough for a study of conscience and duty in terms transcending those of the R.C. clergy, Keneally has failed even to say much in the more limited field.

This is chiefly due to a lack of comic writing skills and the failure of the subordinate characters to work as characters rather than corners in a dialogue.

Egan, a common lawyer who becomes involved in the marriage he should be salvaging, and Hurst, a novice blessed with castration complex of gigantic proportions, sit on Maitland's conscience hand; the superiors Nolan and Costello on the 'establishment' one. But neither side clashes vigorously with the other, directly or through Maitland as agent, and the novel's increasingly critical episodes, developing no impetus, cannot use the novel's advantages over documentary to any effect.

In a work so obviously specialised in its concerns this leaves little room for stylistic or other consolation. Even Maitland's carefully drawn ineptitude, that throws his superiority to his most foolish superiors into doubt and is clearly the most consistent plot-thickener, proves exasperating in its sameness and isolation and exaggerates rather than stifles any apparent need for Maitland's getting out of the church, for his Protestantism. Such a reading is plausible but hardly the intended one, as Maitland does stay in the church and never considers leaving it.

It is, I think, not unfair to suggest that when readings that were obviously unintended begin to assume some great importance the stylistic and artistic media of the novel are not in the author's control.

When Keneally is at his best he is a highly suggestive author but time, and again in Three Cheers he relies far too heavily on what are the comedian's stocks in trade, the importance of first impressions, the face as a reflection of character, e.g.

"'Edgar's face found itself in invincible areas of plumpness around a tiny tight mouth. Somehow Maitland felt vindicated, thinking, 'As soon as I saw him I knew he had it in him to look like that'".

By cementing his slightest observations in such a way Keneally is ultimately making his chief issues subordinate to his marginalia.

Ultimately Three Cheers for the Paraclete becomes a difficult book to review because of the provocative nature of its badness. The thumbnail sketches are clever and a few situations are funny but in a novel so obviously intended, for all the entertainment it may provide, to take a serious look at all the most commonly discussed religious problems of the mid-century one must expect more subtlety and continuity than Keneally
provides. Any serious/comic novel needs to contain, for instance, a gradually developed use of comedy rather than a mere display of jokes (and an author may even have to forfeit some of his best ones).

Perhaps the saddest note is one out of Keneally's hands altogether and that is the way Three Cheers received such enthusiastic reviews in the daily and weekly press. No similar novel from an Englishman could have commanded such respect. nor, I should say, could Keneally, had his previous work not been Bring Larks and Heroes. To see any critic trying to will an amusing but essentially light and rather precocious novel into local greatness is embarrassing in terms of that book and can only encourage that satisfaction with the dour and uninteresting that runs through much of the more optimistic of our criticism.

C A R L H A R R I S O N F O R D


PROFESSOR LFEVBRE, in his work The Sociology of Marx, is concerned with the broadest aspects of marxian theory. He specifically denies that Marx is a sociologist but stresses that there is a sociology to be found within marxian method. The book is extremely useful in breaking down preconceived notions of the content of Marx's thought and in showing the limitations of pedantic interpretation of marxian concepts.

The simplistic view that Marx specified economic fare as the significant basal relationship is shattered early, where the concept of "praxis" is introduced and the restrictions implied by the limited definition of economics (particularly modern economic theory, as distinct from classical "policital economy") are relaxed. Similarly another favored interpretation of Marx's scheme is questioned, that of the hierarchical, one-way relationship of substructure and superstructure. Professor Lefebvre sees this systematisation of Marx's thought as efficient for particular analysis but not sufficient as a total explanation of the theory. He sees it as one example and method of objectifying an infinitely more complex praxis. This scheme is criticised as freezing the theory, becoming in effect an ossified style of analysis that loses its value and its relationship to the original through constant repetition.

In stressing that a sociology which derives its method from marxian theory should direct analysis towards the emergence of forms, the way forms react on contents, structures on processes, Professor Lefebvre also indicates an alternative way in which the outmoded labor theory of value can be related to the total system. From his point of view the real emphasis of Marx was towards the essential difference of man from mere commodities (even if viewed in purely "economic" terms), that of the production of surplus value. In this way man is seen to overflow the form which he must fit for the particular capitalist production mode and come to dominate rather than be subservient to the form itself. The form and the content are in conflict, the basic element of dialectical logic and a condition that typifies all societal levels and that provides the dynamic of the system. Sociological analysis oriented towards the study of forms also arrives at Marx's concept of alienation, the divorcing of abstract attributes from reality and the reification of the abstractions so that they constitute an environmental condition of existence, a condition nevertheless sanctioned by and inseparable from social interactions (because it is essentially an immaterial "thing", re-
taining its entity only through societal relations).

The aspects of marxian theory mentioned so far amply show that there is a sociology in Marx and that his theory can be utilised to provide orientation for the study of society. Professor Lefebvre has attempted the difficult task of relating a theory, which has become an ideology, both politically and academically (in so far as "the" interpretation of Marx has been sanctified and institutionalised), back to the original concepts and designs of the theoriser. In this he has been extremely successful although it is difficult to agree with him, that he has not "interpreted" the material, subjective selection of critical passages alone makes this an extremely difficult task (as is the possibility of being objective about anything) but he has provided a view of marxian theory that shows it as highly relevant to contemporary life and extremely useful to contemporary theory. A drawback, however, is that he nowhere outlines the content of sociology, although he differentiates philosophy, economics and the other associated disciplines as separate fields, the exact scope (the form of the subject itself), is left open and largely to implication. The content of some of the concepts, particularly that of "praxis" is also rather implied than rigorously defined, the final impression being that "praxis" equals reality and subsumes all disciplines (there also seems to be something a little circular in defining reality as reality).

Despite this criticism, I agree with Professor Lefebvre that marxian theory "is part of the modern world, an important, original, fruitful and irreplaceable element in our present-day situation, with particular relevance to one specialised science — sociology".

S. D'Alton.

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ONE EXPRESSION of a fragmented left, reflected in theories and organisation, is that too many radicals see themselves primarily in relation to developments outside Australia. They become followers, even apologists for one or another country, movement or leader. With misplaced dedication, and much abuse, choices are made cruelly. It has often seemed that one must be either for or against the U.S.S.R., China, Yugoslavia, guerrilla movements, Trotsky, Gramsci, Che — and the list can be expanded.

Such characteristics are not confined to the old left, many of the young left seek to adopt, undigested, the experiences, analyses and actions of America's SDS and Resistance, the German SDS and the French student radicals. There are good reasons why so many Australians, including the left, are more often imitators than innovators and our imitations are by no means all negative but given our experience, our history, our institutions we might learn more of value from the British left than from those listed above, and as it is unlikely that anyone will claim for the British left the insight sufficient to provide the answer we may avoid further sterile divisions.

Some on the left in Australia already recognise a debt owed to those associated with Universities and Left Review and New Left Review for their work to restore to the marxist and socialist movements scholarship, relevance and integrity. Those who will now read and consider the ideas in May Day Manifesto, 1968 will be further indebted. The large group involved in this work, academics and students, have, in the main, been associated with the New Left Review.
Their work on the Manifesto began in 1966, the original document appeared in 1967 and this version was written after further study, discussion and meetings throughout Britain.

The value of the Manifesto for the Australian left lies, first of all, in the similarities between the British and Australian labor movements. Britain and Australia are certainly not the same but the development of Australian political institutions derive so much from Britain that a detailed analysis of British society holds considerable value here.

The May Day Manifesto, 1968 is welcome because a serious attempt has been made to develop a genuine critique of British society today. Briefly, but in some depth, class society is exposed and related to the dominant position of the United States. There is explanation of the evolution of ruling class policies from the early cold war confrontations with the Soviet Union till today where the global strategy of imperialism is acting to confront various movements for social change and to exercise an increasing control at all levels and on all continents.

Certainly much of the book is of interest simply as an explanation of the effects of US imperialism's global strategy on all important facets of British life. Here one simply underlines the conclusion that an aspect of imperialist policy (for example the war in Vietnam) permeates and affects the whole of society. The escape route is not to be found in compromises but in a break with the system that creates it. But the real interest and value of the book for this reviewer lies in the discussion on the Labor Party, trade unions, the Communist Party and other radical groups when the authors are considering strategies for socialists.

May Day Manifesto, 1968 could not have been better timed for the Australian market since it arrives on the scene when the Easter Conference For Left Action is taking place. However, one evaluates the analyses provided, and some conclusions should be questioned, there is much to be learned from the description of a resilient, offensive capitalism and imperialism. The thesis of a Labor Party developing (even developed) from a centre for alternative, radical policies to that of an electoral machine offering itself only as a better administrator of the status quo has more than a ring of truth about it. The stress placed on a possible path for rejuvenation, that is for democratic control and participation by the rank and file of the labor movement in the formulation and implementation of Labor Party policies should receive attention from all those who seek a Labor Government in Australia as a real alternative and such a program for rejuvenation should not be seen as applicable only to the Labor Party.

It is noteworthy too that the authors do not underestimate nor scold the trade unions. Giving due recognition to the fact that great efforts are made to integrate or incorporate the union movement into the capitalist system the authors do not place the blame for this primarily on trade union bureaucracies. They do see the need for action against authoritarian union structures and for greater rank and file control of unions but they also recognise that “the need for strong central control, to enforce the ethic of collective action, is, to some extent, authentic.” In similar terms to those expressed in Australian Left Review (see Comment No. 6, 1968 and No. 1, 1969) they seek the upgrading of trade union demands, including the issue of workers' control, for a more militant challenge to capitalism and wider intervention in society.

The authors' views of the Com-
The Australian Communist Party, Trotskyist and other left groups is reasoned and fair although readers with such affiliations in Australia may find some criticisms unpalatable. They note that dangers exist for all such groups if they revel in their smallness while drawing comfort from a movement abroad, “the rationalisation of one’s own predicament by attachment to other successes and predicaments, are only likely to be overcome by direct political organisation and struggle in our society”.

The authors seek not just to teach but to learn and act. Deeply influenced by the movements of the 1950’s and 60’s, especially those of the young, they seek a working together. They oppose those who count heads, manipulate or try to steal the recruits of others. They believe that groups and individuals on the left have the will and capacity to work together but in their own right and with their own identity. Their experience, even in the preparation of this Manifesto, is that many strands of the left can come together. Even the coming together is an achievement, whatever tensions and disagreements emerge, and difficulties only arise when attempts are made “to steer a group to some specific affiliation”.

Who can say that all this is not relevant to the Australian Left in April 1969?

Mavis Robertson

ABORIGINAL HABITAT AND ECONOMY,
By Roger Lawrence.

This thesis was reviewed in our last issue. It is regretted that details were omitted. Mr. Lawrence did his work in the Department of Geography, School of General Studies, at the Australian National University. It was published as an occasional paper. It runs to 290 pages, and sells for $2.00.

Angus and Robertson, 421 p.p., $6.50.

The poems included in this second volume of a proposed three volume edition of Lawson’s verse begin with those written before his departure from England in early 1902 and end with the broken and dispirited verse that was so typical of Lawson’s later work. He came to refer to his English visit as “that wild run to London, that wrecked and ruined me”; and whilst, as is so often the case with Lawson, the truth may be concealed by the self-pity, it seems undeniable that it was a very different sort of writer who returned to Australia — one for whom the promise of his early years was a fast-receding dream.

Part of the cause (or perhaps part of the effect) of this decline was Lawson’s estrangement from his wife, finalised by her taking out a judicial separation in June 1903. At the same time, Lawson’s bouts of drunkenness increased and several times from 1905-1909 he served time in prison either for drunkenness or for not meeting the maintenance payments for the support of his wife and children.

As is to be expected, the quality of the verse in this second volume falls short of that in the first — not only from a technical point of view, but also as a result of the increasingly glib and maudlin tone that could mar even his best work of this period. The increasingly personal and subjective nature of his work could only be sustained and justified if it were capable of rising above personal or subjective interest or if it didn’t merely iterate commonplace or sentimental notions. I think the last poem of 1909, A Regret, shows what I mean.
I wish that I were back again in the place where I was born,
Where the waratahs in clusters from the long white branches hung;
Where I heard the emu singing on the lonely plain at morn,
And the kangaroo a-calling to its young.
And so on.

Some of the more impressive or successful poems in the book are similarly marred. A good example is One-Hundred-and-Three, in some ways the most interesting of Lawson's poems from this period. It was surreptitiously composed while Lawson was a prisoner in Darlinghurst Gaol in August and September 1908. It is a poem full of bitterness, though not necessarily self-pity; and yet its poignant argument can still bog down in absurdities and gross lapses of taste:

We crave for sunlight, we crave for meat, we crave for the Might-have-been,
But the cruellest thing in the walls of a gaol is the craving for nicotine.
Yet the spirit of Christ is everywhere where the heart of a man can dwell—
It comes like tobacco in prison, or like news to the separate cell.

As with the first volume of this edition, Professor Roderick has provided a full bibliographical apparatus: variant readings are listed as well as dates of publication of revisions. Forty pages of notes complete the volume, and include such gems as the extraordinary article John Norton wrote for Truth in 1906 abusing the memory of Victor Daley, an article which spurred Lawson on to write an elegy for his fellow poet.

Leon Cantrell