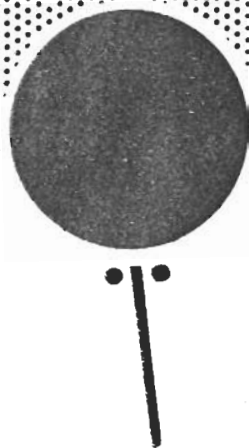


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EDITORIAL—WHY ARENA?

This is a question which it would be reasonable to anticipate, since there is no lack, at present, of magazines devoted to intellectual topics of general interest.

If the aim of *Arena* were merely to express differently the kind of ideas already expounded by a number of other publications, the effort would not be justified.

This is not its object. It may even be described as the very reverse.

Arena's function, as we see it, is to re-assert the claims of Marxism, as a relevant and meaningful guide to social comment and analysis, and, therefore, also to purposive social activity: for this reason, we believe its appearance marks something of a landmark in recent magazine publication in Australia.

Needless to say, we do not expect any bouquets for the mere proclamation of such an aim. On the contrary, we are acutely aware of the need to establish the magazine's value, not by the stridency of its message, but by the quality of its material. We even admit to starting from a point of some disadvantage.

In Australian intellectual life, Marxism has, for some time, been regarded as "non-U" among the more influential moulders of thought — relegated to the lumber room, so to speak.

Communism has been accorded a respect of a kind as a potent (even sinister) political force, particularly in the external world, but also among a section of the Australian working class.

But Marxism, as a system of ideas, has either been ignored, or dismissed somewhat contemptuously, as an outworn, superseded ideology.

This has not always been the case. In the 'thirties and 'forties, Marxism dominated intellectual debate, and the most fertile "idea" publications were either Marxist-oriented or treated Marxism as the most serious contender, for intellectual allegiance.

These were the times of the Great Monstrosities -- the world depression and the Fascist Juggernaut. Both sprang from capitalism. To every sensitive mind, they were unspeakably hideous and menacing. They signified the ugly breakdown of a way of life.

No one on the political right seemed to have any answer to these problems, other than ones which involved the sacrifice of the interests of the people to the greater glory of corporation profit and the insatiable demands of the fascist powers.

The Marxists seemed to have the best explanations for the state that the world had arrived at, and the best alternatives.

POLITICALLY the U.S.S.R. emerged as the symbol of economic rebirth, on the basis of co-operation instead of unbridled competition. Spain, Abyssinia, China were causes that appealed deeply to the anti-fascist ideals of the time, and merged with the larger issue of "collective security," championed by the U.S.S.R. and the communists.

The Popular Front, as realised in France, and the United Front, opened visions of national salvation through the alliance of all parties and strata of the population, in opposition to fascism and the home-grown right.

IDEOLOGICALLY, Marxist materialism provided a healthy antidote to the mystic anti-humanism that followed in the wake of fascism, and the economic arguments of the Marxists were powerfully confirmed by the all-too-apparent facts of life.

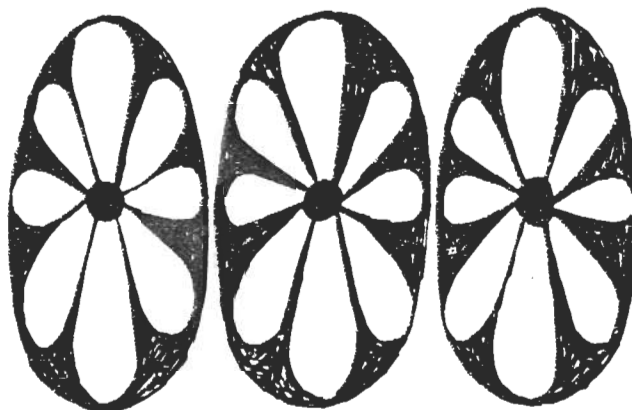
CULTURALLY, a realistic and critical social tone was demanded by the times, and was provided by the left, through the exploration of contemporary dilemmas, and the revival of the democratic art and literary traditions of the 19th century.

With the end of the war and the defeat of fascism, these trends were, for a time, sustained by the continuing momentum of the anti-fascist crusade; but, as the 'forties were replaced by the 'fifties, they began to fade.

There were potent social factors responsible for the decline of the intellectual left. World economic crisis was left far behind, and replaced by a fast-moving, post-war economic boom, that appeared to prove the resiliency and capacity for prosperous expansion, inherent in the capitalist system.

The anti-fascist alliance gave way to the cold war and the anti-Soviet alliance. A sweeping technological revolution gathered pace, making far-reaching changes in the structure of industry and the work-force, and in particular, opening up new avenues of employment for the highly skilled, including the degree and diploma men.

Radicalism and non-conformism began to be expressed now, more in the kind of music one favored, or in weirdness of dress, rather than in social commit-



ment, which was too likely to conflict with one's social situation.

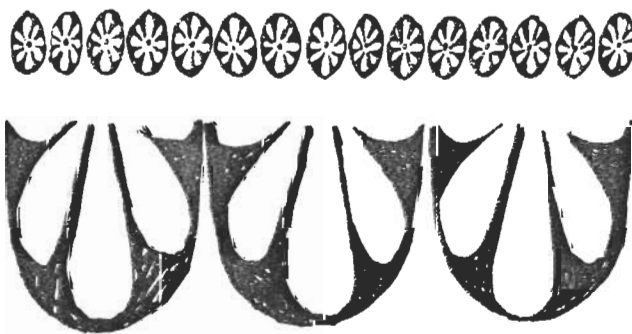
But the decline of the intellectual left was also contributed to, in part, by its own deficiencies.

They failed adequately to develop their social criticism in tune with new social conditions. The economic catastrophe, for instance, was retained as the central feature of the Marxian critique of capitalism, and as it became more and more abstract in the given conditions, so general phraseology tended to replace specific analysis in their economic treatment, with a consequent loss of impact.

The public airing of the defects in the Soviet system under Stalin revealed a serious failure, on the part of the left, to maintain a sufficiently critical balance towards socialist practice, and this led to a considerable loss of prestige.

In artistic and literary production, pastoral and depression themes exerted too strong a backward-looking hold at the expense of contemporary themes. Moreover, too often, writing, for example, became fictionalised history, in which there was over-concentration on externals, at the expense of individual human conflict.

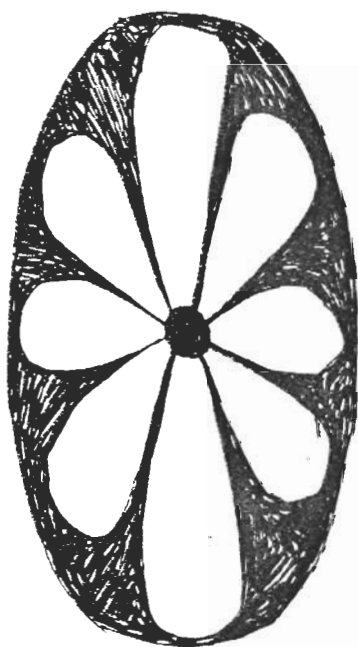
A. A. Phillips, the literary critic, put his finger on this spot, when he said that, while his sympathies lay with the "traditionalists" or realists, "Yet I have to admit that the artist-patriots (Patrick White et al -- *Arena*) are today producing the better, the more meaningful work. The trouble with the traditionalists is that they are traditionalists, and have lost the



sense of forward movement. They follow the tracks of the pioneers, and they thereby deny the spirit of the pioneers, who followed no man's tracks" (*Meanjin*, 2, 1962). This is an over-simplification, but one that bears thinking about.

The left fragmented. A minority adhered to their established standpoint in conditions of considerable isolation. Another minority formed socialist and Marxist groups of a dissident kind. The majority found highly individual solutions to their problems.

A general intellectual movement to the right occurred, in which two trends became uppermost - the liberal and the "radical right."



Liberal social criticism has revolved around Wright Mills and other American sociologists, who have specialised in close, and often significant, studies of institutions and groups. Their ideas are subjected to analysis in this issue.

It is sufficient to say here that, despite their contribution to the understanding of many social configurations, the work of the American sociologists seldom leads anywhere, except to the postulation of various "social engineering" projects to ameliorate group and individual tensions.

Whatever the faults in much of Marxist economic

analysis in recent years, we believe that its emphasis on the class basis of society is fundamental and that, if combined (as it has been, brilliantly, in many periods, not excluding recent times) with specific study of actual situations and movements, it provides an invaluable guide to social understanding and activity.

Politically, the liberals have tended to avoid general commitment, as far as possible, but to take up particular causes which appeal to them from time to time. Often, their efforts are directed in a progressive direction, but because of their lack of general orientation, they are prone to divorce issues from their social context, and so achieve results opposed to their intentions.

On cultural matters, they again espouse the individualistic, and often the obscurantist, and denigrate realism. The somewhat wearisome and uncritical adulation of Patrick White and Sidney Nolan is symptomatic.

Their cultural approach is also marked by a neglect of, and even contempt for, the role of science in society and ideas. What C. P. Snow has said about the distorting effects on British liberalism of this dichotomy set up between science and the other fields of culture is just as apt when applied to Australia.

But it is the "radical right," not the liberals, who have had the initiative in intellectual programmatics in recent years, not so much from their positive contribution but from a talent for high-pressure aggressiveness that has had an intimidating effect on many liberals. This group has founded or taken over a number of magazines to cope with their voluble output, of which the *Bulletin* and *Quadrant* are the most representative.

The radical right have mastered some of the more reactionary concepts of the American sociological school, developed by the far right commentators in the U.S.A. itself. The role of "elites" and "masses" in particular fascinates them, and they have in fact sought to operate the elitist principle in their strenuous political and cultural activities.

These activities cover a wide range, but are always manipulated in such a way as to bring grist to the anti-Soviet and anti-communist mill. Even their criticism of political conservatives centres around their inadequacy or blundering in the cause of anti-communism. Their bias is decidedly and stridently pro-American. They do not shrink even from the techniques of McCarthyism in order to save civilisation from the "communist beast."

The "radical" right are as vocal as ever, but nevertheless there are signs that their tide is now receding. Having little or no real challenge in their ideas, they are suffering the cramping effects of staleness and repetition. In addition, their shrill search for culprits

or victims has reacted back upon them, especially since their sound and fury has been increasingly shown to be unmatched by sufficient strength to be really frightening.

The social situation is becoming less favorable to right extremism and more favorable to the left. At home there is less certainty about future economic stability and security, and with it a tendency for class differentiations to enlarge and produce greater frictions. This is not the place to expand on this subject, but one point is worthy of note.

The intellectual has not gained an independent status in the "affluent" society. On the contrary, he is for the most part a servant of private or government corporations, caught up in essentially the same struggle for improved wages and conditions as is the industrial worker.

Hence, he is becoming increasingly aware of his group economic interests, and the necessity for forms of organisation to assert them. This leads him towards a non-conformist and left-inclining outlook. Activity, Marxists recognise, is the key to social awakening.

In the world at large, too, ideas which conform to the needs of social change are steadily advancing, above all Marxism, and impacting Australia as any other region.

In the great competition between the socialist and capitalist systems, the former is steadily gaining ground despite the lag in accumulated affluence compared with the most advanced capitalist countries. The dynamic of socialism is something that is becoming more and more significant day by day. And as the socialist countries develop, so do their political superstructures become freer of the rigorous features which many in the more stable Western democracies find alien and inimical.

The great colonial awakening has reached a crescendo, reverberating throughout the world the demand of the newly liberated millions to share in

the fruits of advanced technology as independent entities. In what direction will they go, these newly emerged nations? The answer to this question will have profound implications for all of us, and the evidence points to the fact that, while they will pursue their goals in ways appropriate to their own nature, socialism will be their chosen vehicle.

There is one awesome threat that hangs over our heads, blighting the prospects for a future full of stimulating promise. It is the danger of a world war of such destructive dimensions that it would imperil the fate of generations of mankind.

There can be only one way to meet this threat, in our view: to stand up for life, and so for peace, by joining with all those who, from whatever motives, are prepared to act to halt the nuclear arms race and strive for total and general world disarmament.

On all these issues, we come into conflict with the "radical" right, as with all the forces of political reaction. We look forward to some overdue polemics with them.

On the other hand, we obviously have quite a deal in common with the liberals, despite our different fundamental outlooks. Naturally, we hope to meet them in a useful exchange of views and contention.

Our main function, however, is to try to interpret the realities of Australian social and cultural life and its lines of development in the context of the changes taking place in the wider world.

We will not expound one view, or any set of maxims. There is room for much debate and argument within the framework of a general Marxist methodology, and this we shall make it our object to encourage.

We will stumble, we may even fall at times. But we will only fall altogether, we believe, if we neglect to make *Arena* a forum of lively discussion and controversy, among all who subscribe to its general aims.