

HIBERNIA 1 MARCH 1979

Gentle, kindly and civilized, ne

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JURGEN Habermas, the renowned, contemporary German philosopher, has said that "the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet system are the historical facts" which have paralysed the interpretation of Marxism. All too often Marxism is equated with the Russian or Chinese experience, and Marx's actual thought has been submerged beneath the encrustations of Lenin, Stalin, or Mao. Today this situation is rapidly changing. A new more vital study of Marx has arisen in Europe and America among economists and sociologists as well as among students and political theorists. The common accusation against Marx that his economic "predictions" failed is now seen as a misreading of Marx's own scientific claims by such informed commentators as Sweezy, Dobb, and Mandel.

In this present climate, Professor Maguire's new book is especially welcome. Professor Maguire (who now holds the Chair of Sociology in UCC) is a distinguished Marx scholar who writes clearly, (an admirable achievement—given the convoluted nature of Marx's own prose) and pointedly about Marx's own theories. His first book, *Marx's*

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## Capital!

MARX'S THEORY OF POLITICS. By John M. Maguire.  
Cambridge University Press. £9.00.

DERMOT MORAN

*Paris Writings: an Analysis* (1972), was the first full length study of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts to appear in English. These manuscripts are remarkable for their portrait of Marx as a humanistic social philosopher and they were taken up in detail by the existentialist movement.

Maguire's present study is more ambitious, offering an analysis of Marx's theory, or theories, of politics from the early to the late writings. Marx has been accused of not having a fully developed philosophy of the state; of underestimating the political role of parliamentary democracy; and having an oversimplistic view of the "necessity" and inevitability of the final communist revolution. Marx himself would reject the possibility of politics as a separate science although he was passionately interested in, and commented on,

the politics of his day. He viewed society in a more "totalistic" manner.

It is difficult to do justice to Marx's political analyses because of the complexity of the actual politics of the time, and also because Marx's accounts of events, such as the French Revolution, remained merely in project form. Maguire overcomes these difficulties by a careful reading of Marx's major texts, as well as of the shorter newspaper articles and speeches. His approach is critical but sympathetic: comparing Marx's analyses with those of present-day historians, forcing Marx to live up to the goals he himself had set.

Up until 1848 Marx was optimistic about the possibility of political change: he saw the bourgeois revolutions in Europe as the prelude to the future workers' one.

These early hopes, that the bourgeoisie would follow their own self-interest and create a democracy, which the workers would finally overthrow, were shortlived. After 1848 Marx moved away from revolutionary politics towards the more sobering task of economic and political critique. Marx's central recognition in economics was that capitalism lives by crises. Classical economists had seen these crises as accidental intersections of events; Marx saw them as inherent in the structure of capitalism itself. His greatness, as a critic, was his recognition that critique was rooted in the objective nature of the crises themselves. (It is instructive to reflect on the change which has come over political thinking in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo.) As the crises recur with increasing severity, people are forced to rethink their commitment to a political ideology, or more correctly, the ideology fails to provide a cover-up of the crisis. Maguire gives the example of mass unemployment as a fact which no ideology can effectively cover. From crises comes critique, from critique comes revolutionary practice. This is perhaps the essence, though simplified, of Marx's theory

of revolution.

Professor Maguire has included excellent sections on Marx's supposed determinism. Marx neither held that all motivation is economic in essence, nor did he hold that a proletariat would necessarily achieve a revolution. This would contradict his own methodology, which can provide a critique only within the historical context. Future predictions belong to myth not Marxist science. Other criticisms are valid—the notion of the proletariat is now recorded as too simplistic and monistic for contemporary Marxism.

I have only two minor criticisms to make of this excellent book. First, what Maguire says about Marx agrees very much with what continental philosophers, such as Habermas, are saying. Why no mention of Habermas? Maguire's bibliography in general neglects French and German theorists. Second, the 'text-book' manner of presentation, with its introductions, summaries and abbreviations, makes reading difficult and perhaps will serve to discourage the wider audience this book so undoubtedly deserves. It is clear that Marx scholarship now flourishes in Ireland.