

help at all. Caught in the morass of bureaucratic planning, the Soviets now reach for the solid support of Western exports as well as Western "capitalist" economic theory. This is a sensible procedure. Yet under the paralyzing ambiguities of the creed the ablest economists of the Soviet Union expend their best energies in seeking to square linear programming with the useless labor theory of value. "The 'anarchy of the market' that Marxism was intended to abolish," Bertram Wolfe writes, "is as nothing compared with the 'anarchy' that has set in with . . . overzealous, centralized command 'planning.'"

The Soviets, although they cannot live by the Marxist scriptures, cannot live without them either, for they are necessary to the quasi-religion of Marxism. If Marx and Engels and their apostolic successors, Lenin and Stalin, were

wrong, what reason would there be for the immense sacrifices of the Russian people on the altar of "Socialism"? The Soviet power élite is stuck not only with Marx's now obsolete economic theories, but also with the distortions which it piled upon the decaying edifice of the founders' doctrine. It is this maze of sophistries and falsifications that harbors the real dangers to the stability of the Soviet régime and thus to world peace. As Wolfe sees it, a crisis is building up in the Soviet Union: the very necessities of a centralized planning system are colliding with Marxist theories and beliefs.

Bertram Wolfe does not care to speculate on the outcome. He has set himself the task of tracing the path of a doctrine, from its birth in the hey-day of liberalism to its present agony in the age of totalitarianism, and this he has accomplished superbly.

that will react to such an issue); but they are such puritanical prigs that they throw our own licentiousness into relief. Anyway, they are out to destroy the family and subvert love with labor. The teeming millions are faceless and lack individuality. They scare the hell out of us (and the Russians, too, we think) and render sensible our mission to civilize the heathen.

One of Jan Myrdal's prime accomplishments has been to strip away the anthill quality and the facelessness without damaging the dread, dull social structure that is Red China. He does this by stringing together about thirty vignettes, each a distillation of a conversation, held through an interpreter, with a member of the Liu Ling Brigade of central Shensi province. The interviews, a few of which appeared in shortened form in SR April 10, were obtained *in situ* during a residence of about one month in the late summer of 1962. Myrdal was accompanied, during a year's stay in China, by his wife, Gun Kessle, who also spent a month in the village of Liu Ling and has contributed interesting photographs and empathic ink sketches of some of the people of the village.

Liu Ling is in a fairly barren part of an ancient, arid, impoverished section of China. It also happens to be in an area that was controlled by the Communists for some time before the final mainland collapse of the Kuomintang. Accordingly, it went through its preliminary struggles years before most other parts of China, although shifting military fortunes and the vagaries of Communist policy, inspired by the waxing and waning of a United Front and the need for prosecuting the anti-Japanese war, caused the most uneven of developments. But this has long been known as a region of hardship and suffering. The most common residence remains the cave dug out of the loessial cliff. Yields of millet and wheat are on the low side, requiring the cultivation, per mouth, of much more land than is the case elsewhere. Despite this, because of fairly high rates of migration, often impelled by crop failures leading to famine, labor is scarcer than land. Indeed, one recurrent characteristic shared by the persons interviewed is origin outside Liu Ling. Most have come from a place called Hengshan in northern Shensi. Who can imagine how things must have been in Hengshan to have made so many people come to inhospitable Liu Ling?

Returning to the book itself, note must be taken of its numerous faults. Some of these are inherent in the nature of the material and its sources. Mostly, the peasants of Liu Ling are inarticulate and their stories, especially those told by women, are flat and repetitious. The

## New Tidings from Cathay

**Report from a Chinese Village**, by Jan Myrdal, translated from the Swedish by Maurice Michael (*Pantheon*. 374 pp. \$6.95), introduces some thirty residents of the town of Liu Ling in Shensi province, who, in their own inarticulate fashion, display the stoicism of peasants who for centuries have "bent with the breeze" of changing political fashion. Morton H. Fried, professor of anthropology at Columbia University and member of the East Asian Institute, did field work in central China before the fall of the Nationalist government. He is the author of "Fabric of Chinese Society."

By MORTON H. FRIED

LET US not pretend that this book would have other than the most restricted appeal if its subject were not the butt of our current national hate campaign. Additional gravity derives from the strange conduct of our political relations, which, in a century distinguished by the disappearance of distance, has made China more remote from the United States than the moon, so that, like sixteenth-century Europeans, we question all travelers for their tidings of Cathay. As things presently stand, few can cater to this hunger for information, and none can satisfy it. Most of those who try are journalists, whose laudable efforts give brief illumination to the fantastic social landscape

of the fitfully rousing giant country that will be the key to Asia for centuries to come, as it has been in the past. One hundred and fifty years of subordination and torpor have given way to rage, which is now being dispelled in spasms that shake the world.

For reasons that have to do with our own nation's foolish and trembling approach to this re-emerging power, we have grown accustomed to viewing China as a human ant heap. When fears are focused on China, the American public is disposed to reassert old myths and conjure up new ones, all with the purpose of dehumanizing the Chinese people and making them a fit target for our reformist zeal and wrath. It would be comforting to accuse them of communizing and debauching women (there remains a portion of our public



—From the book.  
" . . . more remote than the moon."



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dullness is largely in the telling and no fault of Myrdal. There are, however, many dramatic incidents: imprisonments, escapes, beatings, desertions, surprise attacks, and victories, conveyed in leveled sentences; sometimes we almost hear the drone of the villagers' Mandarin mixed with the drone of flies in the stifling Shensi August.

A certain lethargy also pervades the book as a whole. We are told in the introduction, in what seem to be surly passages, that no attempt was made to present "a smooth and easily read book." Myrdal gives fair warning of his intentions by presenting a rather good critique of his own work in the form of a rationalization as to why it is better in its rather unfinished form. But this scarcely prepares one for the lack of synthesis. The volume, in truth, is a notebook. Since few readers will be capable of assessing the statements of the informants, it is a pity that Myrdal does not offer at least a brief overview of the common events which appear in the narratives. One fleeting reference to Edmund Clubb's *Twentieth-Century China* is simply not enough.

Interspersed among the chapters are tight little doses of facts. Called "tables" by the author, these are motley collections of information, much of great value, even if poorly organized. By working from text to tables and back again, by supplying one's own detailed map of the region, by collating bits of information from different chapters, one can assemble a startlingly clear and fresh picture of the process by which the villagers of Liu Ling participated in the vast social changes that have been under way in China. When compared with other accounts, such as C. K. Yang's *A Chinese Village in Early Communist Transition* and W. R. Geddes's *Peasant Life in Communist China*, or with documents such as René Dumont's *Revolutions dans les campagnes chinoises*, an even more articulated and useful picture emerges. Unfortunately, such do-it-yourself appreciation of Myrdal's book is likely to be confined to specialists. Myrdal, if he has heard of these books, doesn't mention them, and takes pains in his introduction, as we have noted, to avoid any labor of creative synthesis.

But what remains for the general reader is of considerable value. Myrdal

gives us faces in the Chinese crowd. Whether the case is that of Ching Chung-ying, who at age eleven had to carry the water and slops for a sadistic landlord, and ended up forty-two years later proudly doing the same thing for the labor group for vegetable cultivation of the East Shines Red Labor Brigade; or that of Li Kuei-ying, the pro-birth-control woman pioneer who organizes the women to nag recalcitrant husbands into more progressive attitudes, readers will find the humanity and individuality of these people inescapable and impres-

sive. Like their ancestors for tens of centuries, the peasants are bending with the breeze but retaining their basic natures.

One speculates, perhaps idly, knowing the present impossibility of such a thing, about a similar volume, written in Chinese, which might present some Americans to the people of Liu Ling. They might be shown at their usual round of tasks, presented in their own inarticulate speech, but not faceless, caught in the act of supporting the dropping of napalm on a village of farmers.

## The Free Self in a Captive Society

**Marxism and Existentialism**, by Walter Odajnyk (Anchor. 211 pp. Paperback, 95¢), **The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre**, by Wilfrid Desan (Doubleday. 320 pp. \$4.95), and **The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre**, edited by Robert Denoon Cumming (Random House. 491 pp. \$7.95), demonstrate the complementary character of two complex secular gospels. *Emile Capouya's essays and reviews are a regular feature of SR.*

By EMILE CAPOUYA

EXISTENTIALISM, and particularly Sartrean Existentialism, appeals to many because it begins by presenting the world as arbitrary, inhospitable, and refractory. Its metaphysical doctrines encourage the suspicion each of us has in his heart—that the cosmos is not about to give us an even shake. There are persons whose temperament is such that they are gratified when the bad news is authoritatively confirmed. If private dissatisfactions and social troubles can all be blamed on the harsh conditions of this conditional world, then there is an excuse for failure and an end to the necessity for action.

Thus the appeal of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical premises, and his triumphant demonstrations that "hell is other people," that "anguish" is our portion—that, in short, Augustine was right about the world being necessarily evil and wrong about the existence of God or any saving good. In our country that strain of Existentialist thought, which seems to argue for quietism or suicide, is sometimes compounded with Kierkegaard's theological agonies and Albert Camus's late doctrine of abstention to make an informal creed of more or less dignified despair. A number of our literary critics,

particularly, who have lost faith in democracy but are restrained by good sense or good taste from embracing aristocratic or Fascist principles, have helped to popularize the underlying presumption that man is a being eternally and pointlessly on the rack. In their usage terms like "existential anguish" and "absurdity" have acquired an almost sacramental value, as has their favorite symbol, the clown, or Christ in motley. Well, Sartre has fooled those romantics by taking his argument a step further.

This morally indifferent world is nevertheless the theater of choice. By its choices, consciousness, or the self, creates value. The arbitrary complexion of the universe (Sartre formally denies causality and determinism) insures that the choices made by the self are absolutely free. A sad corollary is that the resulting values are absolutely arbitrary. The most significant feature of the system is that the self cannot take refuge in a plea of age, sex, or previous condition of servitude; in Sartre's words, man is condemned to be free. At this point he introduces a distinction, surprising in the context, between authentic and inauthentic choice. Men are free to make either kind, he says, but ought to prefer authenticity—though it will do them no good in the end, since the universe is proof against their piety and wit. I cannot follow Sartre's account of the genesis of authenticity, but I presume that he regards individual selves as unique, and that authenticity characterizes such of the individual's choices as reflect his own uniqueness rather than a borrowed set of values. For honor's sake, then, and with a cast-iron guarantee of failure, one must choose authenticity.

Now, in strict Sartrean theory, all acts are equally acceptable so long as they qualify as authentic; that doctrine, like the blood-mysticism of D. H. Lawrence,