

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNISM, by P. J. D. Wiles; Basil Blackwell, Oxford; 42s.

The average economist in the west has little idea of how a communist economy functions. He is aware that there is some kind of public ownership of the means of production and distribution, and some measure of state planning of the economy. He is aware, too, that there is a potential conflict between central planning and a rational use of the community's scarce productive resources. Rarely, however, has he made any study of the actual working of a communist economy. This analysis of the economics of communism by one of the leading economists of the west is therefore to be welcomed.

In Part I, Professor Wiles shows the different forms ownership may take and has taken in the communist world, and exposes some of the peculiarities of Marxian economic thought. He shows how little attention has been given by the communists to the idea of scarcity. Their studies of the price mechanism in the capitalist world have concentrated on demonstrating the way in which the worker is exploited and have ignored the role of prices in securing a rational allocation of resources.

In Part II, Professor Wiles turns to the question of resource allocation. Although the market has not been entirely abolished in communist countries, its role in resource allocation is small. The planners may decide what is to be produced, but sell consumer goods on a market. Generally, however, they will fix prices so that the predetermined outputs are just cleared on the market. If there is a shortage, prices are raised, and if stocks accumulate, prices are lowered. In the western economies, such price movements are indicators of what consumers want, and they also provide incentives for firms to adjust their outputs to consumers' wishes. In the communist world, these changes do not necessarily lead to adjustment in the production plans.

Part III deals with economic growth. Some complex and technical statistical questions are discussed here. It is shown that although there may be points at which communist statistics may not give an accurate picture of the economic situation, there is little doubt that a faster rate of growth has been achieved in the communist world than in the west. Various explanations are discussed. Part of the explanation is undoubtedly a higher level of investment, made possible by the ruthlessness of the totalitarian regime. It is by no means the only factor, however. Professor Wiles attaches considerable importance to educational policy. This has been adapted to the needs of the economy—imperfectly perhaps, but much more perfectly than western educational policy, 'with its classical languages (which tend to absorb the best brains), its liberal arts colleges and its anti-technical snobbery'.

Part IV, Eschatology, follows naturally. To the Communist believer, scarcity belongs to the capitalist order and to the socialist phase that is to precede the achievement of Full Communism. In the final stage of Full Communism there will be a world of plenty, and all the economic problems of scarcity cease to be

relevant. Professor Wiles also deals with an alternative that he calls Full Capitalism, in which a similar degree of affluence is reached. This is at once the most interesting part of the book and the most unsatisfactory. This is not necessarily a criticism, for Professor Wiles is here dealing with a situation that at present seems remote to most of us, and the whole discussion must, at times, appear unreal.

It must be stressed that this book is aimed at the economic specialist. It presumes a fairly thorough knowledge not only of 'mainstream' economics but also of Marxian economics. Even the advanced student will not find this an easy book, and it is most unfortunate that Professor Wiles should have made this important study of communist economics more difficult than it need have been. Most readers will be seriously handicapped by the author's practice of giving a list of, for example, eight allocation models and subsequently referring to them by number rather than by a descriptive title. Unless they have a better memory for such detail than the reviewer, they will be constantly turning back to see what the author is writing about.

J. M. JACKSON

A STREET LAMP AND THE STARS, the autobiography of Don Borrelli of Naples, written with the help of Anthony Thorne; Peter Davies; 21s

WASTE, by Danilo Dolci, translated from the Italian by R. Munroe; Macgibbon and Kee; 42s.

The publicity given to Don Borrelli's work for the *scugnizzi* of Naples was largely due to Morris West's *Children of the Sun*, an impassioned description of the life of the homeless boys who roam the crowded streets of the city in search of food and shelter—and that means the rackets of every sort which are their usual means of securing them. It is useful to have Don Borrelli's own account of his work of reclamation and how it came about. The romantic overtones of the earlier book are not altogether lost—one suspects that the 'help' that is acknowledged in writing the book is that of a journalist—and one is still left wondering what exactly is done for the boys, or by the boys, for that matter. There is much 'mood writing' to invoke the squalour of the streets but little documentation: a single case history would have given the sort of information one needs to envisage the boys not as a group but as persons. And little is said of the training the boys receive or of any programme for their future. It may be that all Don Borrelli can accomplish is a first-aid operation, and that means much in a situation so shameful. One wonders if his book is to appear in Italian. It is certainly important that the first thing to be done is to arouse the conscience of Italians themselves to the failure in social responsibility which the *scugnizzi* reflect.

Danilo Dolci has attracted even greater attention than Don Borrelli, and it is