

## Bruce McFarlane: The Consummate Marxist

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Many a philosopher has graced the world of scholarship with panache and passion. Few however have combined these rare attributes with the power to detach logic from self-aggrandisement and the courage to walk alone with the truth even when the stakes are high. In Bruce McFarlane, the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* was extremely fortunate to have been led for many years by a genius who championed the cause of the underprivileged and yet always stayed partisan to epistemology. By the time he finished his first degree he had won six outstanding prizes for academic brilliance. Despite having worked on development projects with many illustrious scholars, Bruce remained humble, preferring out of choice to fight his academic battles from lesser known locations with pen and ink rather than the lush of ivy league universities. He always coveted his relationship with Kalecki, who like Bruce remained extremely humble about his scholastic contributions.

I met Bruce for the first time at a conference organized by JCA in Quezon City in 1986 when a serious recession threatened to derail industrialization in Southeast Asia. My academic advisors Johan Saravanamuttu and Hing Ai Yun had recommended me to the conference organisers. A good majority of the scholars gathering at that meeting were singing aloud Lenin's verses that capitalism had reached a monopoly stage with many young observers dancing to this seductive tune. I had a completely different story to tell when it came to my turn to present my paper. Quoting Marx (and his followers such as Joseph Schumpeter) I argued that the crisis had got Marx (1956) rather than Lenin right – that capitalist crises are occasions when competition forces out old modes of technology with new ones (gales of creative destruction in Schumpeter's words). Offering evidence of increasing capital-labour ratios and the introduction of new technologies (product and production) in electronics assembly and test rather than closures, I had attempted to argue that the conditions for another boom in Southeast Asian industrialization were already being laid. It was part of a broader Marxist argument consistent with the views of Marx, Luxembourg and Brenner - that the appropriation of relative rather than absolute surplus value was the driver of industrial capitalism. Bruce was the lone ally I found as he defended the scientific merits of my arguments, telling fellow radical scholars to stop moralizing and to concentrate on the scientific laws of capitalist accumulation as advanced by Marx himself. Many an academic attach their academic paradigm to Schumpeter's arguments on the positive role of competition in producing gales of creative destruction effect (innovation) on capitalist growth. The fearless Bruce was happy to quote instead the original Marx who had argued lucidly on how competition forced firms to replace old modes of technologies with new ones.

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Bruce was to tell me in 1993 in Wollongong that Marxist scholarship must be built on argument and evidence rather than populism and rhetoric.

As an intellectual Bruce mixed scholarship with democratic rather than radical praxis. While Keynes dominated the Western world's stand on social welfare, Bruce preferred Kalecki's work. Concerned over the decline of the welfare state across the world, Bruce campaigned vigorously in the academic community to win students towards the cause of workers and their welfare. Bruce also engaged extensively in the campaigns on the unionists in Australia to protect workers' rights. Unlike many scholars Bruce never carried the image of a *prima donna*, and hence was very popular with the workers. Having stayed and interacted extensively with Kalecki, Bruce's own works show considerable leaning toward Kalecki's arguments.

Bruce's views on Kalecki can be seen from his attempts to examine Kalecki's contributions to an understanding of third world development when he became advisor to the United Nations as well as the governments of Mexico (1953), India (1960) and Cuba (1960), and the Centre for Research on Undeveloped Countries in Warsaw, which he helped establish in 1963 (see McFarlane, 1996: 187). To Bruce, Kalecki (1964; 1968) not only provided a robust link with Marx's (1867; 1956) laws of capitalism but also offered a more cogent explication of economic theory for directing government expenditure targeted at raising aggregate demand (to reduce unemployment) on necessary consumption. Consistent with Marx's (1867; 1853) view on the forces of production, Kalecki (1976) also made the argument that reducing unemployment can only be made a sustainable goal if it is linked to raising productive capacity. Among the other important departures Kalecki made to Keynesian economics that attracted Bruce's attention related to the international conditions necessary for full employment and the international arrangements required for its sustenance. Bruce showed evidence of Kalecki's critique of American and British free trade economists over the double standards they preach when telling developing economies to abandon industrial policy and protection. Indeed, his attack on the McCloy plan in 1947 that called to limit Third World industrialization drew enough support among the electorate at the international bank for its rejection (see also Kriesler, 1991). Also, unlike the revolutionary left *a la* Che Guevara that preferred the gun over ink when calling for de-linking, Bruce McFarlane chose the latter route to promote Marxist thought by sticking to argument and publications.

Bruce also wrote considerably on international political economy issues, especially Australia's subordinated flirtation in a capitalist world economy dominated by the United States. In arguably the most lucid explication of modern Australian economic history, Bruce (1981) contended forcefully on how changes in the economy helped absorb the inflow of immigrants who had come without the requisite capital (to provide the aggregate demand essential to expand labour demand) and with about half of the housing and social capital. Contrary to the notion that markets would clear, Bruce provided evidence on how the Australian government imported capital and invested it to stimulate industrial development. Industrial policy was instrumental in the rapid growth that took place in this period. As a consequence industry's share in national product grew from 10% in 1861 to 25% in 1881: manufacturing's share rose from 5% to 12% in the same period (McFarlane, 1981: 20). He was to argue later on how

Australian development policy – especially specialization in food exports and supply of military assistance under the allied forces led by the Americans that defined development and defence efforts caused inflation after the Second World War (see McFarlane, 1984). Bruce provided historical evidence to argue how economic specialization and Australian exports shifted from capital goods (e.g. machinery and machine tools) to food and raw materials. Subjugation to American and British economic and foreign policy set in motion Australia's transformation from a rapidly industrializing nation to a raw material exporter. This pattern was also to explain the promotion of liberalisation and specialisation in the export of raw materials and later light labour-intensive goods by both the United States and United Kingdom across the developing economies when the former two economies themselves had developed through active industrial policy (see also Reinert, 1994; Hamilton, 1791; Chang, 2002).

As a co-editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* along with Peter Limquenco, Bruce gave undivided support for Marxism as a scientific field of inquiry. In addition to providing rigorous interpretations, Bruce also mentored many young scholars selflessly to appreciate the epistemological value of understanding Marx's works scientifically. Under Bruce and Peter, the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* became a rigorous platform for critical exchange on the recurrence of economic crises over the last four decades. While poor health has forced Bruce to finally retire as one of the editors, I expect his courageous comradeship to remain as a shining beacon for the new generations seeking solutions to problems of development and crisis.

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