



**TASA** The Australian  
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**TITLE: Jim Cairns as Social Theorist and Political Actor**

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The life and work of Jim Cairns represents an interesting and unique combination of social theory and political practice in Australia. Over the course of this life he progressively refined his conception of an emancipatory social theory in concert with an admirably concrete political practice. Cairns' conception was built out of a Marxian critique of capitalism and developed to incorporate the neglected dimensions of culture and psychology that came to prominence around the 1960s and 70s. The trajectory of Cairns' theoretical development led him to wrestle with the problem of institutional structures, not just in terms of the machinery of government or production, but of cultural institutions that shape peoples' psychosocial development. As such, he made a significant, though sometimes underappreciated, contribution to progressive thought and practice in Australia. Despite this, I suggest that he failed to theoretically come to grips with the complexity of the problem of cultural institutions and social change.