

# 'All Conflicts Are Mistaken'

**May Man Prevail? An Inquiry Into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy**, by Erich Fromm. New York: Doubleday & Co. 282 pp. \$4.50.

**Marx's Concept of Man**, by Erich Fromm. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 280 pp. \$4.75.

**Escape from Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm**, by John H. Schaar. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 349 pp. \$6.50.

By Ernest S. Pisko

In the almost thirty years since his arrival in the United States, German-born Erich Fromm has written an impressive number of books full of original and provocative thoughts. Some of them, like "The Art of Loving," deal with problems of the individual; others, like his two most recent ones, discuss social and political problems of the Western world. How wide a reputation the author has gained is shown by the fact that he himself has now become the subject of a book, John H. Schaar's "Escape from Authority," which undertakes a critical survey of his concepts.

Both of Mr. Fromm's latest books deserve serious consideration. They do a much needed job of dispelling widely held misconceptions and offering tentative answers to some of the most burning questions of our time.

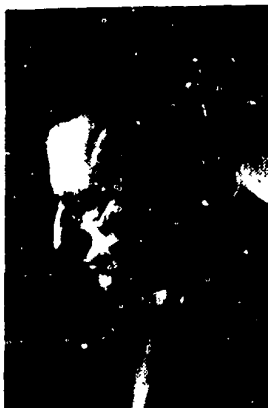
This applies especially to "May Man Prevail?" which treats the causes of East-West tension and the threat of atomic war. The root of East-West hostility is in the author's opinion that the Soviet system is no less a "mythical entity" to most Americans than the capitalist system is to most Soviet citizens. His detailed and incisive analysis of both systems leads him to the conclusion that "the Soviet system is not the opposite of the capitalist system, but rather the image into which capitalism will develop unless we return to the principles of the Western tradition of humanism and individualism."

He sees the Soviet Union as a "reactionary welfare state," doubts that it is really aiming at world domination, and be-

lieves that its police-state aspects will disappear in proportion to the growth of its economic prosperity.

He warns that the present policy of the arms race, whether controlled or not, "will result in militarized, frightened, dictatorial societies," and that nothing short of universal controlled disarmament can maintain peace and democracy. "There are no important economic or even political conflicts between the two power blocs which in themselves would constitute a reason for war," he writes.

He pleads for mutual recog-



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Erich Fromm

nition of the status quo in Europe, which would include Western recognition of East Germany and curbing of West German rearmament in exchange for the full guarantee of the independent existence of Berlin as part of the Western world.

Mr. Fromm's final conclusion is that "what matters today is preserving the world." In order to achieve this, he insists that "certain changes have to be made, and in order to make these changes, historical trends have to be understood and anticipated."

It is, of course, precisely this understanding of historical trends, on which opinions are—and presumably will remain—divided. Who has the better understanding of a situation can be argued interminably; but it can be decided only after action has brought about a new situation. White many of Mr.

Fromm's observations on the Soviet and Western societies, Germany, China, Latin America, and the dead-end-direct nature of the atomic arms race cut to the core of the respective problems, some of his basic premises are open to serious questioning. His belief in mankind's surpassing "rationality" and in the possibility to solve any dispute by rational means runs counter to most of the available evidence—historical and otherwise. By the same token he fails in "Marx's Concept of Man" to prove that the father of modern communism has been gravely misinterpreted and that faithful adherence to his doctrine would contribute to building better and happier societies.

Mr. Fromm is correct in declaring that Marxism has been grotesquely distorted by both the Russians and the Chinese. He is probably also correct in saying that many of today's most violent anti-Communists have never read a single line of Marx's writings. But he ignores the fact that the contradictions and ambiguities in the economic and philosophical treatises of Marx and Engels have allowed a Lenin, Stalin, or Mao Tse-tung to pick out what suited their purposes. The early writings by Marx, now for the first time offered in an English translation and included in Mr. Fromm's book, do strongly suggest that for the 26-year-old Marx the main objective was the "emancipation of man as an individual." But though Marx never dropped that objective, he himself blocked the road to it by much of what he put down in his later writings.

As Mr. Schaar points out, Mr. Fromm sees no irreconcilable conflict between the needs of man's nature and the principles of a just and productive social order. For Fromm, he writes, "all conflicts are mistaken," meaning they can be disposed of by rational behavior.

These limitations of Fromm's philosophy are no reason to turn away from it. No philosopher has ever had all the answers. Mr. Fromm has more than many of his contemporaries. If Mr. Schaar's book is used as collateral reading, one can confidently expect an intellectual adventure of high order.