

Committee of "Public Safety"

TWELVE WHO RULED. By R. R. Palmer. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1941. 417 pp., with index. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CRANE BRINTON

IT is rather surprising that no one before Professor Palmer has written the history of the Committee of Public Safety as a body. There have been histories of the Reign of Terror, histories of the "dictatorship" of Robespierre, biographies of some—though not all—of the individual members of the great Committee. But no one has done quite the job Professor Palmer has done. And it is a job that needed doing. There was no Fuehrer, no Duce in the Terror—certainly not Robespierre, as Professor Palmer clearly shows. For a few months, power was indeed concentrated in the hands of a sort of War Ministry composed of twelve very different individuals who somehow managed to present a united front—well, an almost united front—to the world and to work out some of the means of governing now so familiar to us—planned economy, mass warfare, controlled public opinion, even a sort of rudimentary Ballila called the "School of Mars."

Professor Palmer skillfully weaves the biographies of the twelve into the history of their times, with a proper concentration on the brief period, just short of a year, during which they ruled France. He writes from an expert's fund of knowledge of the French Revolution, but he writes for the general reader and not merely for his fellow Ph.D.'s. He has an admirable gift for exposition and for the enlivening detail or anecdote. He has that detachment from French political quarrels which is not so easy for American historians to achieve as one might at first assume. Above all, he maintains a balance between the standards of the professional historian—still best summed up in the famous phrase of Ranke, "he will merely show how things really happened"—and the demand, nowadays so insistent, that those who write about the past should attempt to arrive at sociological and philosophical generalizations useful in the present.

He is much too good a historian to overdraw parallels between the rule of his twelve dictators and contemporary totalitarian dictatorships. He points out the fumbling and incomplete absolutism of the Committee of Public Safety, its internal quarrels, its divided aims. He shows how completely lacking in the Year II were the techniques of propaganda and control developed in the years to come. And



—Wood engraving by H. Glintenkamp.

he goes to one of the roots of the matter when he shows that the twelve were at bottom—yes, even Robespierre, indeed above all Robespierre—good democrats, eighteenth-century intellectuals brought up in a belief in the natural goodness and reasonableness of men, in a respect for "fundamental law," which made them regard their own work as a mere temporary dictatorship of necessity.

Nor does Professor Palmer press the parallels he does draw into explicit lessons for us today. He gives many leads for reflection and discussion, materials which should enrich

An Anthology of Philosophy

LANDMARKS IN PHILOSOPHY. By Irwin Edman and Herbert W. Schneider. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1941. 1008 pp., with index. \$4.

Reviewed by RUBIN GOTESKY

IN "Landmarks in Philosophy," Professors Edman and Schneider have gathered together an excellent anthology of the seminal writings of those philosophers who have most influenced mankind. The purpose of the editors was to create a "textbook," a word which still, despite all evidence to the contrary, seems to mean something dull, stupid, and lifeless. Actually the book is unusual in several respects. It is really an anthology and not a "textbook," for it brings the reader face to face with great thinkers and their works or sections of them which are most interesting and alive from the standpoint both of thought and of literature. Again, the selections are sufficiently long and so carefully made that they neither destroy the continuity, flavor and freshness of the thought nor the central ideas of their authors.

Lastly, the selections are taken from

the thinking of anyone interested in the current crisis. Now and then he drops a hint of how he stands, as when he remarks of Camille Desmoulins that "the type of liberal who once idealized Camille is disappearing from the twentieth century world." Desmoulins does indeed seem now a "child in politics," an irresponsible sentimentalist, an Ariel gone astray in revolutionary violence. But one wonders whether liberalism of any type can survive without some admixture of the kind of sentiment that idealized Camille in the nineteenth century. Camille went to the guillotine—most unheroically, for he broke down disgracefully before the scaffold—because in the midst of the Terror he had called for a Committee of Clemency. It was under the circumstances an impolitic and from the point of view of the ruling Committee of Public Safety a dangerous demand, but it involves a sentiment apparently essential to what we call liberalism. That sentiment can be put in nice terms, such as "love of freedom" or "tolerance," and it can be put in bad terms, such as "Ladicean indifference" or "lack of moral courage." But unless a lot of people share it, we are in for much more rigid dictatorship than that of Professor Palmer's "Twelve Who Ruled."

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those thinkers who, during their lifetime and after, most immediately and directly influenced society.

Many philosophers have been omitted whom a professional philosopher might like to see included, but for the purpose of the lay reader nearly everyone is included who deserves to be. Spinoza has been omitted, but the reason given is sensible. The editors felt that Spinoza could not be chopped up without destroying the essential unity of his thought.

Even a cursory examination shows that the selections fall more or less into a broad, sociological pattern. For example, Plato and Aristotle are fairly representative of the kind of thought a slave society produces. Augustine and Aquinas obviously represent the thought of institutionalized Catholicism at two important stages in its history—at the time of its establishment as a stable, dominant social institution, and just before its decline. Descartes and Hobbes both represent the new emphasis upon reason and sensation which characterized the revolutionary thinkers of a Europe in painful transition from feudalism to capitalism.

CRITICS AND TRADITION

(Continued from page 6)

theory of medieval chivalry, we must talk of King Arthur and his knights, even though William the Conqueror was a liar and a thief. It is fair to add that the chivalric ideal was rarely lived up to, pointing to William, but it is a cart-before-the-horse blunder to make the notion of knighthood account for the villainy of William.

Secondly, even after we have separated "authoritarianism" from concrete instances of cruelty and misrule, the term remains indefinite and over-elastic. To the anarchist, the police power is tyranny; to the Protestant, Papal Infallibility is dictatorship; to the extreme liberal, pure food laws and the inspection of factories is despotism. As for a "strong state" in the military sense, it has no fixed value in a changing world: after a century of scorn for it, it turns out to be the chief hope of democrats anxious for their liberties. Hence all abstract condemnation of "etatism" in the great political philosophers is meaningless. Bodin wanted a strong king—but why? To set a real power against the anarchy of the great nobles. Hegel wanted a strong Germany led by Austria, later by Prussia—why? To organize defence against the repeated invasions of Napoleon. It is true that the desire for stability or justice or national unity leads political theorists to various shifts, some of which we must oppose if we are democrats. But the very fact of a man's being a political theorist precludes the possibility of his desiring constitutional chaos or despotism tempered by assassination. A system, even that of Hobbes, is a system for peace and order and *against* the emergency methods which we, looking upon a period of disorder, inevitably associate with "authority."

These considerations need not disarm our resentments or weaken our determination. On the contrary, they force us to concentrate on the practical aspects of the problem—how to govern firmly and fairly, relying on tradition, yet adapting the tradition to new needs. As Dr. Morgan suggests in introducing us to Nietzsche, the more sincere we are as democrats, the more eager we must be to cut out the gangrene that can infect democracies like other states. For this Nietzsche is an unrivalled caustic; he is not, however, the first or only one. All the gifted critics of democracy, all the advocates of authority mentioned by Professor McGovern, have something useful for us to know, provided we take them in their right intent. Not all critics are enemies, and some enemies are

excellent critics. And indeed democracy is one of the most criticizable things in the world, all styles of government being open to profound and undeniable objections. The difficulty lies in strictly determining the fault and knowing how to make changes, which in turn is the justification of political theory. Good theory, of course, takes its rise in real situations—in the religious wars in France (Bodin), in the Napoleonic wars in Germany (Hegel), in the industrial anarchy of nineteenth-century England (Carlyle). We may dislike Carlyle, we may dread

The Nazi Technique

THE SPOIL OF EUROPE. By Thomas Reveille. With a foreword by Raymond Gram Swing. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1941. 344 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HENRY B. KRANZ

HOW does the Nazi system work in the conquered countries? What are the Nazi tricks, devices, and techniques in the economic and political fields? Is it correct to say that the Wehrmacht has played the decisive role in all the German victories so far? What is the task of the Nazi Economic headquarters? How does the German wonder economy work? Did Germany really become Europe's banker?

These and many other important questions are for the first time answered in a highly interesting book written by an expert who wants to remain anonymous but is said to be an economist in the United States Government service. No thoughtful American who is interested in learning what might happen here if the Nazis win, has done his duty until he has read and pondered this book.

Mr. Reveille writes with honesty, sense, and what seems to be an un-



—From "New World Challenge to Imperialism."

Plato's Republic, but we should remember that Plato did not invent tyranny, forced labor, and government by spies and murderers. He found those institutions already flourishing in "democratic" Greece and his "authoritarian" Republic was designed to abolish them.

This is obvious enough. Yet there is apparently a strong temptation to forget it, to find our enemies everywhere, to make a present to our opponents of all the great minds in history who were not out-and-out liberals, leaving only the Fourth of July orators on our side. At this rate we shall surely discover that Thucydides, Jefferson, Dickens, and Joan of Arc were proto-fascists, and we shall still more surely reduce the "history of ideas" to a fairy tale which is not even worth refuting.

usual balance. Part one of the book: Nazi strategy of political and social domination outlines the German procedures in general. Part two: The art of commandeering money and banking, and part three: The technique of Nazi economic conquest. All are history, and history well told. It becomes clear that loot and plunder were developed by the Nazis very early into a mechanism as efficient and ruthless as that devised for warfare, propaganda, and persecution of party enemies.

Mr. Reveille, in the last chapter of the stimulatingly informative book, considers Germany's three alternative approaches to the problem of England. He thinks the leaders of the Third Reich had to choose between an armed truce, an invasion, and a negotiated settlement—and that they chose the third alternative. When Hitler realized that the English did not show any signs of weakness he sent Rudolf Hess to Scotland, a man who was the best choice for a desperate mission. Hitler lost his gamble. President Roosevelt's historic address of May 27, 1941 was America's and England's answer. The invasion of Russia was another deliberate gamble of Hitler who wanted to disunite public opinion in England and the U. S. A. And although the conquest of White Russia and the Ukraine might offer certain advantages, the United States and the four British Dominions as large producers and exporters of food will produce all the necessary airplanes and guns without denying themselves butter—and ultimately win the war.

Mr. Reveille's book is more than scholarly; it is truly intelligent and will especially help every student of world problems.

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