

livelihood. In a book that continues the stories of some of the characters of *Vagabonds* and earlier novels, he makes it clear that the concerns of the fishing village are not the concerns of a world of cities and industry. The young gipsy-eyed heir is made British Consul, and begins his rise in affairs, sending his traveling salesmen south with store-made dresses; but at home the women go from house to house to borrow, according to tradition, a fine skirt in which to carry home the hay.

Knut Hamsun has always been master of the epic treated familiarly; *The Road Leads On* is constructed in magnificent proportions, and told in the most informal conversation. The characters are rich, savory folk: peasants for the most part, shepherds elevated for a while to road-workers or bicycle-boys; ladies who sparkle into middle age, like Tidemand's mother, Gammelmoderen, who could always find a place to meet Otto Alexander, the Gipsy, even though he might have to jump two stories to safety in the end; the druggist, the hotel-keeper, the English guest, the doctor who had his eye torn out by Aase, the witch-woman; and finally August, enterprising, a Munchausen of the North, with his amazing capacities as man-of-all-work, and the shabby weaknesses of the pioneer in industry. He comes to Segelfoss as a symbol of the world of automobiles and competition, descending with his ingenuity on the peasants for all the world like a nightmare Machine Age on a terrified bunch of artists. Not that Hamsun endows his villagers with any false subtleties; they are all painted in the raw primitive colors of truth. But August, for all his charm, comes as a disrupting influence; he is baptized under the waterfall, it is true, but he gets drunk to cure his chills after the ordeal; he fires his pistol in the air time and again to stop the village fights; he curses the knife-wound in Gammelmoderen's breast; but "it was his mission in life to father all forms of progress and development, and he had left behind him desolation in one form or another wherever he had gone."

In such dubious innocence, he brings the twentieth century to Segelfoss, enchanting even London-bred Gordon Tidemand with his invention, and stunning the community brilliantly with his wealth when he receives a long-overdue lottery prize of forty-thousand kroner. Distributing ten-ore notes to the children, buying up sheep by the score, he makes a figure of himself in the town. He has imposed a mechanistic civilization on them, but he still can impress them with the feudal magnificence of himself and his overlords.

*The Road Leads On* is a folk-tale, slow, rambling, simple. The very competent translation carries the folk-quality well. Money and competition exert their power, but not in far-reaching sweeps; tides and weather are more important. What must be pointed out, as industrial life seeps into these margins of the world, is the necessity for order in its meaning; merely a mechanistic civilization will indeed ruin a farming and fishing country, as far as its culture and the charm of its people is con-

cerned. Knut Hamsun has pointed this out without any mention of the class struggle, which seems a long way away from Segelfoss. It is only in the flashes of poverty, of sudden rise through profit, that we can see the implications of the modern world's encroachment on a land alien to large-scale industry and cities' sprawling influence. Geography, if nothing else, has made Norway's life simple; the valuable miles of coastline do not allow much room for metropolises; and shrewdness and unplanned development can do a lot towards the ruin of such a country. All this lies implicit in the novel; for the rest, *The Road Leads On* is a slow, good-natured story of slow and simple folk.

MURIEL RUKEYSER.

### Required Reading

*LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF V. I. LENIN*, by R. Palme Dutt. International Publishers. 50c.

This is without any question the best introduction to the study of Lenin that is available. And it is much more than an introduction. Despite its brevity, it is so thorough and so thoughtful that the most careful student of Lenin will, I believe, profit from reading it. It seems to me that Dutt might well undertake a much longer work on Lenin, applying in detail the analytical methods that he uses so skillfully in this little book.

The aim of the book is to show Lenin "as a world leader at a critical turning-point of human history," and this Dutt accomplishes by describing at every point the background of Lenin's thought and the setting of his actions. After a short introductory chapter on the historical epoch in which Lenin lived, Dutt briefly but precisely outlines the fundamental Marxist theories, traces the conflict between Bolshevism and Menshevism, describes Lenin's work during the war, summarizes the Bolshevik Revolution, and portrays the founding of the Communist International. Thus he makes clear the extraordinary unity of thought and action that characterized Lenin's life, and prepares the way for his excellent analysis of Leninism. The book closes with a discussion of the events of the past decade and of the work of the Third International, "the heir of Lenin."

All in all the book seems to me a model of its kind. There are omissions, of course, but I am amazed at what Dutt has managed to include in his ninety-two pages. The only pertinent comment is unqualified recommendation.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

### Capital's Private Armies

*PRIVATE POLICE*, by J. P. Shalloo. *The American Academy of Political and Social Science*. \$2.50.

Revolutionists would do well to read this book, if only to familiarize themselves with the enemy's resources and organization. The author, a typical "impartial" professor, is mud-

dled in his outlook and apologetic for the corporations, but the information he supplies is valuable.

For example, it is important to know that the railroads in the United States employ more than 10,000 police at an annual payroll in excess of \$20,000,000—ostensibly to protect valuable freight shipments and to carry on routine police work. But—the roads have arsenals for their police, which include "riot guns, tear bombs, submachine guns, revolvers, clubs, badges, rifles, shotguns, cartridges, rule books, and all other equipment necessary for any emergency. The riot guns and submachine guns are used in protection of value shipments . . . and also for protection of property and strikebreakers during an industrial crisis."

It is interesting to know that that paragon of class collaboration, the Baltimore & Ohio, uses its police to find out "what is going on in all shops and among its employees at all times." Other roads, such as the Pennsylvania, use private detective agency men as spies. "Every railroad uses some system of espionage." A detailed exposition of the organization and methods of these undercover men makes this section particularly valuable to organizers on the railroads.

The material on coal and iron police and undercover men in general, while largely familiar, is useful because it is compact and inclusive. To be sure, it is rather sickening to read of the Molly Maguires as "a grove of criminals" and that at Homestead "the strikers were responsible for the bloodshed and destruction far more than were the Pinkertons"—but it is worth it to learn such facts as that Governor Pinchot, that eminent "friend of labor," sponsored a bill supposedly abolishing the coal and iron police in Pennsylvania—and supplanting them by a special state police force to perform the same functions at much less cost to the coal operators! It seems also that this amiable gentleman showed his devotion to the cause of labor by pardoning a coal and iron police officer a few days after the thug had been sentenced for assault!

There is plenty of other material in the book which makes it useful to those who are daily battling against these "lowest forms of human life" and their employers. To get such information one can endure the professor's smug bourgeois moralizing.

JAMES STEELE.

### Hearst's Lackey Reports

*THE BOILING POINT*, by H. R. Knickerbocker. Farrar and Rinehart. \$2.50.

As part of his intensive campaign to whip the American public into a war-acceptance and preparedness mood, William Randolph Hearst sent Knickerbocker on a tour through Europe to "get the facts" on the war-danger there. The task of this trusted lackey of the yellow press was an easy one; war is scrawled all over the face of western Europe. His series of dispatches, based on interviews with some thirty kings, dictators, ministers and generals, and

featured with daily scare-heads in the Hearst papers, have been gathered together to make this book. Knickerbocker asks, "Is war coming in Europe?" With one voice, his subjects answer piously: "We want peace; we are preparing for war." When will it come? Few believe that it "can be averted" for ten years. Many admit that it may break tomorrow. Foreign Minister Barthou of France finds it "unsafe" to predict that it won't come this year (1934). And the evidence is everywhere discernible; the world hurtles toward war at a feverish speed.

The book is replete with the brilliant inanities, glib superficialities, and slick distortions that are well-known features of Knickerbocker's reportage. It opens with a stupid non sequitur: Many predicted that war would break out when the Nazis captured control of Danzig; this did not happen; therefore "Ten million European lives [the next war's estimated toll] have been saved in this city of Danzig." Because King Boris of Bulgaria "walked almost to the door" to greet him, Knickerbocker finds justification for the paradox that "the kingdom of Bulgaria is a democracy." This on the eve of the fascist coup engineered by Boris, with thousands of workers rounded up and tortured in concentration camps! While weighing minutely the possibilities of war among the smallest Balkan states, Knickerbocker studiously avoids speculation on the ever-present danger of concerted attack on the Soviet Union, the largest country in Europe. True, he does mention in passing, the notorious Hitler-Rosenberg plan for immediate war upon, and the partition of, the Soviet Union, but he presents this as an isolated fact entirely unrelated to the European scene. Our "penetrating" reporter seems strangely blinded to Japan's military agents, who are openly scurrying about Europe in frantic efforts to line up allies for her planned war on the U.S.S.R.

Ironically enough, at the very moment when the Reich's financial collapse is emblazoned in daily headlines, we read in Knickerbocker that Germany's economic condition is steadily improving under Hitler, and we hark back to the scurrilous series on *The Red Trade Menace* of several years ago when, conversely, Knickerbocker was gleefully predicting the collapse of Soviet economy on the very eve of the successful completion of the Five Year Plan in four years!

HENRY COOPER.

### Chaucer at Harvard

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS GENIUS**, by John Livingston Lowes. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.50.

With his customary professorial charm and scholarship, Lowes does no more than restate the accepted facts of Chaucerian scholarship—Chaucer's activity in the world of affairs, his fluent narrative gift, his "broad" understanding of "the human comedy," and similar clichés. He traces the usual medieval influ-

ences on Chaucer, the poet's wide literary acquaintance with Latin classics, *Roman de la Rose*, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Froissart, Machaut, etc. Such data are, of course, essential to an understanding of the poet, but any critical work pretending to validity must adequately relate the poet to his social-historical epoch. Such a relation Lowes fails to establish.

Life in Chaucer's England was more than a series of jolly pilgrimages, pleasant days, and courteous knights. Actually, social forces were intensely active: witness, for example, the Wat Tyler revolt of 1381. This spontaneous reaction to objective conditions by the rural masses and the urban proletariat of apprentices and artisans historically was part of the struggle between a decaying feudal system and a rapidly expanding commercial economy. Led by Wat Tyler and John Ball, a radical preacher who had long advocated socialist doctrines, the starved masses marched through town and countryside, pillaging landlords' homes, burning manor rolls, hunting down bailiffs and justices. They converged upon London, where they sacked the palace of John of Gaunt—powerful Duke, Chaucer's patron, and hated symbol of oppression to the rebels. Confronting the young King Richard II. Tyler and his followers demanded the abolition of villeinage and the commutation of feudal dues and services. These were granted; but at a second meeting when further demands were presented (abolition of differences in rank and status, confiscation of church lands, etc.) the

king's followers resisted. In the resulting dispute, William Walworth—Mayor of London, and Chaucer's friend—attacked Tyler and killed him. This broke the spirit of the rebels, who were soon mercilessly put down, their leaders hanged, their temporary concessions rescinded. But their outbreak served to hasten the downfall of the manorial system.

It is probable that Chaucer witnessed these events in London. As Controller of Customs for the Port of London during the revolt, he may have been present, along with Walworth and other merchants and officials, at the negotiations with Tyler. Yet in all his poetry there is no reflection of the turbulence of the epoch—it reflects chiefly the concerns of medieval leisure class literature (for example, his translation of Boethius, the courtly love conventions in *Troilus and Criseyde*, etc.). This makes it impossible to justify the perennial notion of Chaucer as a "realist." Even in the *Canterbury Tales* the poet is writing in a literary tradition directed solely at the entertainment of the upper classes. Thus, when "low" characters are introduced—miller, reeve, cook—they are treated in the manner of the *fabliau*: as churls, cuckolds, butts of obscene jests. Like his own character, Panrade in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer served his masters well.

And Professor Lowes, by abstracting him from the turbulence of his times, enters with Chaucer in those regions above the battle whose dwellers do nothing more significant than radiate "sanity," "good sense," etc.

ANTHONY KYE.

## Speaking of the Dance

ROBERT FORSYTHE

THE charm of being a regular contributor to a magazine is that you can start by reviewing *The Thin Man* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and before the editors know what is happening you can be ending with a dissertation on the place of joy in Communist behavior. I have had ideas on the latter subject for a long time, but my excuse for mentioning it here is Mike Gold's remarks (in the *Daily Worker*) on the dolefulness of the revolutionary dance groups. I am not a devotee of the dance and my sole contacts with the subject have been when dance groups have appeared as extra added attractions at evenings given over more largely to other purposes. The subjects on those occasions have been War or the Scottsboro boys or Tom Mooney and the dancers have shown the tragedy and revolutionary fortitude under torture, but I am always hopeful that one of the dancers will rise and shout (if the thing can't be done better in pantomime): "To hell with this ugly world; we're fighting with joy for a new one!" However, I hasten to add that I am not condemning the dance groups and do not want to single them out as culprits. The il-

lustration came easily to hand and was used for that reason.

Strictly speaking, it is a great treat being a Communist. This is true because Communism is the only sane and hopeful and optimistic idea in the world. What is there left for anybody with brains and a heart? There is the retreat to feudalism which Fascism affords. There is the pathetic clinging to a lost cause which democracy and capitalism allow. As a philosophy, as an idea, and as a concrete reality in the Soviet Union, Communism is on top of the world. It is a success, it is established, it belongs to the solid future. On that basis a Communist has every reason to assume an attitude of superiority. We must fight, we must struggle against a decaying capitalism and its brutal forces of reaction, but we need never fight with despair. Communism can't lose. It may have setbacks, it may be longer in coming than we should like, but it is in the stream of history and there is no stopping it.

From the mere standpoint of being on the inside of history, a Marxist has an immeasurable advantage over anybody else. The most recent example is the N.R.A. Even the