

always been hobbled by lack of fuel, and although Libya had been a source of hydrocarbons from ancient times, there was little real effort to search for oil in that Italian colony.

—In 1940, the year Italy came into the war, Italian arms were being sold literally around the world, weapons that were sorely needed by the armed forces at home, so depleted after five years of campaigning in Ethiopia and Spain.

—Learning that the blitzkrieg was about to strike Holland and Belgium, Mussolini alerted the Brussels Government (which ignored him).

—There was never anything like total

mobilization for war under Mussolini. He wanted Italian life to be as little disrupted as possible. As a war leader he was not better than Asquith or Chamberlain, but there was no Parliament that could topple him in time to avert disaster.

One principal lesson above all emerges out of this spacious and leisurely book. It is the enormous price paid by a society that, in exchange for a presumed efficiency, sacrifices those institutions—a free press and a vigorous opposition—which alone can protect it from the arrogance, incompetence, and corruption of people in power.

diverse figures as Marx, Dewey, Hegel, Adorno, Milgram, Solzhenitsyn, Skinner, and Kristol. One doubts that so many subjects can be dealt with adequately in such short space, and one wonders whether Molnar (or any other scholar, for that matter) has the professional competence equal to so broad and all encompassing a task.

Even the title subject of the book, authority, seems to present Molnar with difficulties. Rather than offering a systematic treatment of the term Molnar barrages his reader with any number of possible conceptions. First we are told, authority is the mediating agent between man's desire to be free and his desire to be part of a group. Then authority is based on one's right and ability to enforce norms. But it is also exercised exclusively with the community's benefit in mind; it is "analogous to love." Yet authority is valid only insofar as "the community understands its *raison d'être*." On the other hand, the community cannot be too conscious of authority's role, for authority also "has a mysterious aura about it"; it is "transcendent." Nor, one is led to assume, can we pick and choose authorities. Authority presupposes a "rock bottom inequality" among human beings, a "natural hierarchy" that ordains "natural leaders" with the task of lording over the community. One way or the other the purpose of authority is ultimately rational, its substance eminently "moral." It is moral not only because it binds society together, but also, Molnar informs us mysteriously, because it trains man in the perception of "higher law," and, as "we are links in the transcendental order," leads us to the "fullness of our human vocation." All of these conceptions may be perfectly valid, but the fact that they are never systematically tied together makes it difficult for the reader to appreciate whatever arguments Molnar may want to introduce.

Lack of precision is not the only flaw in this account. *Authority and Its Enemies* suffers most from its central thesis, a perspective that is not so much incorrect as it is trivial. According to Molnar, the critical problem in modern America is the weakening currency of authority. Authority is not taken seriously. Its power has waned in the family, in the school, in the church, in the courts, in the workshop, in the army, and in the state. This decline in salience augurs

## Authority and Its Enemies

by Thomas Molnar

(Arlington House: 142 pp.; \$7.95)

### A. James McAdams

In the publishing world Arlington House is recognized as the principal mouthpiece of the American Right, an alternative outlet for those conservative intellectuals whose ideas, opinions, and tastes are not well received by the country's larger and more liberal publishing firms. In addition, Arlington House is unusual in that many of its books are not spontaneously submitted but are commissioned. A conservative scholar is contacted and asked to write a book-length analysis of a pressing social or political concern; in return he is guaranteed a substantial audience through the agencies of Arlington's Conservative Book Club. Arlington House publications are not necessarily of poor quality—Kevin Phillips's *Emerging Republican Majority*, a controversial but reasonably sophisticated study, is a case in point. Nor are its writers lacking in skill or expertise; many, in fact, would number among America's leading intellectuals. But even allowing for exceptions, the problem with Arlington House is that it often—too often—fails to get such writers at their best, and thus many of its books are simply breezy and unoriginal accounts geared to a captive audience that doesn't mind being fed the same old arguments over and over again. This is not the best way to make the case for American conservatism, and, as a con-

sequence, many conservative thinkers have sought to peddle their wares elsewhere. Others, however, have chosen to remain attached to the fold, to the benefit or detriment of their careers and talents.

If *Authority and Its Enemies* is any indication of its author's sympathies, Thomas Molnar is clearly such a hanger-on. This work, if we take the word of Conservative Book Club propaganda, is "must reading" for the traditionally minded. Molnar, we are told, "dares to lay it out straight"; his case is "compelling," his observations "piercing," and his prescriptions are "sure to stir debate." The descriptions could hardly be further from the fact. Molnar's case is dull, his observations predictable, and his prescriptions far from truly polemical. His argument simply never gets off the ground. He rambles on in an annoying stream of consciousness fashion, jumping from one subject to another without ever really moving to the heart of the issues under consideration, without ever really offering insights of substance and consequence. In just 142 short pages the reader is treated to Molnar's personal opinions on such a vast array of topics as politics, philosophy, ethics, genetics, religion, education, and aesthetics, and to his ad hominem appraisals of the works of such

unfavorably for the continued existence of these institutions. Authority is society's only defense against chaos, and without it we are doomed to a war of all against all, a Hobbesian nightmare of lawlessness and despair. Who but the anarchist and the fool could disagree? Molnar's point is true almost by definition, since, as social scientists have long argued, societal boundaries are defined in terms of authority, and indeed it is impossible to talk about society without simultaneously invoking its authoritative institutions. The crucial issue is not the necessity of authority per se but the role that authority is allowed to play in each of society's institutions and the degree to which its exercise is circumscribed. This is the key feature that enables one to distinguish among societies.

If Molnar recognizes the varying roles and degrees of influence to which authority can lay claim, his vision is remarkably narrow. Given the decline

in the legitimate exercise of authority, he argues, there are two, and only two, political alternatives to society's degeneration into chaos. The first avenue, the despotic regime, is undesirable because it entails the wholesale subordination of freedom and traditional values to brute power. The other recourse, however, the authoritarian avenue, is more palatable. This is the "Augustan" state, the embodiment of both traditional mores and a healthy dose of authority. To be sure, Molnar notes, we may have to sacrifice some of our freedoms in this state, we may have to put up with a strengthened executive of an increasingly "military character," but anything would be better than the recourse to sheer despotism or, conversely, sheer anarchy.

Clearly, Molnar would like to be bold and shocking in suggesting such a state, and he warns us against quixotically dreaming that our "decrepit institu-

tions" might be restored to good order. The fact is that Molnar never conclusively demonstrates that American institutions are so thoroughly bankrupt, so ineluctably destined to failure, that we should busy ourselves now with the erection of the Augustan edifice. Indeed, far from being shocking, his conclusions seem merely nonsensical, and the reader discovers little reason for taking him seriously.

What makes this account regrettable is not just that the book is so inadequate, but that Thomas Molnar is such an excellent scholar. Anyone who has read his *God and the Knowledge of Reality* or his *The Decline of the Intellectual* must recognize the acuity of a truly serious and accomplished thinker. *Authority and Its Enemies* is a book that should never have been written. In the future Molnar will, one hopes, direct himself to studies more worthy of his skill and his intelligence.

## The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol. I. 1964-1966 by Richard Crossman

(Holt, Rinehart & Winston; 688 pp.; \$16.95)

### Lady Suzanne Haire

When Richard Crossman was first elected to Parliament as a Labor M.P. in the landslide of 1945 that ousted Churchill and the Conservatives, he was already prominent as an Oxford don, a political journalist, and propagandist. In the radio war against Nazi Germany he was one of the brains at the British Broadcasting Corporation who revamped the German grammar to make broadcasts from London more easily audible through enemy jamming. When Prime Minister Attlee formed his government, however, Crossman was passed over—no doubt because of his reputation for irresponsibility. He was "too clever by half," too brilliant. Exiled to the back-benches for the next twenty years, Crossman became a thorn in the side of the party leadership. With Aneurin Bevan, the fiery Welshman whose oratory in the House surpassed even Churchill's, Crossman became the leader of a group of assorted left-wing

M.P.s and found numerous issues on which to stage "revolts." (Crossman at one time described the group as the "57 Varieties.")

But while there is death in British politics, there is hope. When Harold Wilson became Prime Minister in 1964—thanks partly to Crossman's efforts—the reward came in his appointment as Minister of Housing. Crossman anticipated the portfolio of Education, for which he was eminently qualified. But as is so often the case, he was given a job about which, he admits, he knew virtually nothing.

This massive first volume of his diaries, published posthumously, begins with Crossman's first day as Minister of Housing and ends two years later upon his appointment as Lord President. Two more volumes are to follow covering his ministerial career up to 1970, when the Conservatives were elected and Crossman became editor of the *New*

*Statesman*. He died in 1974.

Crossman had long believed there was too much unnecessary secrecy in British government; in the *Diaries* he wanted to disclose "the secret operations of government which are concealed by the thick masses of foliage which we call democracy." He admits the picture will be neither objective nor fair, as it is a personal record seen by one participant of a government at work.

The transformation of the author from an "innocent" outsider to a departmental minister is the book's major emphasis. A novice in matters concerning housing and inexperienced in the ways of government, Crossman could have been delivered into the hands of his civil servants. But he was determined to hold his own ground and devotes many chapters to the ups and downs, the tussles, arguments, and maneuverings—real and imaginary—within his department.