Book Reviews

The Presidency. Crisis and regeneration. Herman Finer. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1960. 400 pp. $6.95.

When it was suggested recently (22 July, page 215) in these columns that a serious debate, going to the structure of our American government, seemed imminent, it could hardly have been anticipated that the debate would begin so soon. Before the suggestion was made, this book by Herman Finer must have been at the printers. It is now before us. And it does begin the debate with vigor and comprehension. Formally, by title, it is addressed to the Presidency; but like others who have sought to confine their arguments in this matter, Finer escapes to the other regions of government. Ours is a system of shared powers; and it is impossible to consider one branch without allowing for the impact of the others.

Perhaps it is because this is a presidential year that the Finer attack is made on the executive sector and spreads from there to the others. But this is not the only reason. It is, much more importantly, that the Presidency is the only source of positive policy-making and because this has become a matter of life and death for the nation. If it is not protected and improved, the chance that we shall be unprepared for a crisis involving survival, and undefended when the crisis arrives, becomes a frightening possibility.

In view of this, which is Finer's opening theme, the pertinent question is asked: What has happened to transform the office, so ingeniously devised by the Fathers and so successful in former years, into the institution of all others most in need of rescue from its present debilities? And the answer is, of course, that it is nothing that has happened to the office; it is what has happened all about the office to make its competence insufficient for its present and future responsibilities. In irrefutable arguments based on figures and historic trends, Finer shows why this is so. The amazing growth and increasing complexity of the nation's internal problems, as well as its position among the other nations, has loaded the Presidency with burdens no man could possibly carry alone.

No man could carry them. But there have been developments which have made it less likely that men who most closely approach the stature needed will be chosen for the office. The evidence for this is all too plain. If the first line of Presidents—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Monroe, Madison, J. Q. Adams, and Jackson—is compared with the last group—(reading backward), Eisenhower, Truman, Roosevelt, Hoover, Coolidge, Harding, and Wilson—it is seen that giants in the White House are no longer so certainly insured by our system of selection.

The turn came when Jackson left office and the operations of the party system were institutionalized. Someone has said that the qualities it takes to be elected under that system inevitably disqualify the successful candidate for the Presidency. And there is something in the stricture. It is no longer, apparently, necessary to be born in humble circumstances and never to have become more distinguished in any quality than the most common voter. This was true from Harrison (the log-cabin and hard-cider candidate of the Whigs in 1840) to McKinley; but this commonness has now been replaced by an even more unreliable appeal—an appeal directed to the television audiences who can be fooled by the use of the actors' arts. An actor for President? That, say many of the critics, is what we are getting. There is no more objection, of course, to an individual because he is an actor than because he belongs to any other occupational group. But it ought not to provide him with a specious glamor. There ought to be some understood qualifications for the office which are related to its duties and responsibilities. These qualifications are hard to enumerate; but their lack is not at all hard to identify.

A sort of footnote to this is furnished by the weakness the electorate has always had for generals. There have been, among the 33 presidents, four recognizably professional ones—Washington, Taylor, Grant, and Eisenhower—and several others—such as Hayes, Garfield, and Pierce—who made much of their military records. If Washington is excepted on the ground that he was more statesman than soldier, and Jackson because he was an amateur, none has been a distinguished President and some have been our most deficient ones. This is said to underline the dangers of selection for *any* reason other than probable competence.

But the possibility of bad choices—perhaps probability would not be too strong a word—is given a disastrous emphasis by the performance, under stress, of the best of modern choices—say Wilson, Hoover, or Roosevelt. All were highly competent; all were industrious and dedicated; all were partial failures. Wilson had to give up his domestic program to give all his attention to the First World War, and he left much unfinished business that had to be the first responsibility of Roosevelt more than 20 years later. But Roosevelt had the same experience. After 1938, and until 1945, he simply had no time to give to anything except world affairs. There was a time when the Secretary of the Interior did not have an interview with Roosevelt for more than a year. And other Secretaries, if their difficulties were not quite so great, had much the same ones. As for Hoover, the problems of office left him quiveringly helpless while the country degenerated into chaos.

We need then, as Finer says emphatically, better men in office; but we also need a different kind of office, one that will give leadership, carry the burden of executing the laws faithfully, and make us secure in a parlous world. It can be achieved, he thinks, only by adopting the principle of collectivity. One man cannot do what has to be done. He suggests that 12 men, properly chosen and properly disposed, could. He would, therefore, abandon the kind of reforms that have been fashionable since Roosevelt's time—reforms that attempt to make the office efficient by furnishing the President with more and more assistance; all that does, Finer suggests, is to smother the President; and Finer further suggests that we try an entirely different approach.

All those people in the White House, now chosen by the single President, ought to have some kind of direct responsibility to the people. After all, we are a democracy. At least the chief assistants ought to be so chosen. Finer would have them be heads of departments, except for one or two who would be deputy or assistant Presidents. But it would be corporate cabinet. Its decisions would be collective ones, and all members would be responsible for them. As for their qualifications, Finer would make it necessary for all of them to be members of Congress or at least to have served four years in that body. Incidentally, this would, he feels, have a beneficial effect on Congress, about which he is even more caustic, in its present state, than he is about the Presidency.

There is more to this. Any critic who passes what might be called the constitutional barrier—that is, who allows himself to consider what he would recommend if the Constitution did not exist—is pretty certain to make some suggestions shocking to those who will not give themselves this freedom. These suggestions, moreover, involve not only the organ of government they have set out to consider, but all the others as well. The relations are too intimate for any to be considered in isolation. So Finer has a few suggestions to make about Congress as well as the Presidency. The Supreme Court—perhaps on the grounds that he had stirred up enough controversy already—he leaves pretty much alone. In the end, the debate will involve that body too.

What shall we say of these criticisms and suggestions? I prefer, at this moment, to say that the criticisms are valid. They do point to the need for change, and drastic change. As to the suggestions, it seems to me inevitable that we shall go back to the state of mind Madison was in a few months before the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Concerning the Executive, Madison said that he was not certain in his own mind whether he should be one man or whether he should be so situated as to be *primus inter pares*—the first among equals. How is that to be done? If we are to reverse the Fathers' judgment that the President should be one and try to make him a collectivity, how shall we dispose the relationships among the *pares* so that the Presidency will exhibit initiative, wisdom, and dedication; so that jealousies and ambitions will be minimized; and so that the public interest will become the first and last thought of everyone involved? That is the problem posed for us.

Herman Finer has made a suggestion. We shall hear from others. The first problem for the listeners, the undecided, in this debate will be to listen without prejudice, without preconception, and especially without constitutional blinders. It ought to be recalled that Washington, Franklin, Morris, Wilson, and all the others attendant on that Philadelphia conclave recognized no binding duty to the document under which they were *then* governed, and that if they had, they would have been stopped from producing the one we have been governed under ever since. Not even such charters are immune to the erosions of time and change.

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Africa Today and Tomorrow. An outline of basic facts and major problems. John Hatch. Praeger, New York, 1960. 289 pp. $4.

Events in Africa are moving much too rapidly for publication schedules to keep up with them. Inevitably, any book dealing with Africa which attempts to give an outline of basic facts and major problems is out of date before it can appear. *Africa Today and Tomorrow* was completed in the middle of 1959. Since then there have been major changes in almost every African country. The former French territories, with one exception, are now independent nations. Rioting in Nyasaland and more recently in Southern Rhodesia has raised questions about the long-term stability of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. A threatened African rebellion in the Union of South Africa has been crushed, but crushed in such a way that hostility between white and black has been exacerbated. The last few weeks have brought independence to the Belgian Congo, followed by violence, economic chaos, and intervention by the United Nations.

At the same time that the Africa which John Hatch wrote about has been changing rapidly, world interest in the affairs of that continent has become more urgent. More and more Americans are coming to feel that they need some guide to the continent which will help them to understand the reasons for African unrest, their demands for independence, and their needs for economic and technical assistance. Hatch has provided a succinct and informed account of recent African history which should be very useful as a background to the news reports that are now in the foreground. The focus is upon political and economic developments, each country being described in its turn. Hatch, who is an Englishman, has concentrated upon the regions where British interests have predominated. Some 175 pages deal with these areas. The discussion of the Portuguese territories and of the former territories of Belgium, France, and Italy is much sketchier. A final chapter, entitled "Future perspectives," attempts to predict the trends of the future. No one could quarrel with his conclusion that "All the signs in emergent Africa point to a revolutionary situation. . . . No one can doubt that during the next few years a series of revolutions will occur in every area of the continent—some constitutional, some violent, some in co-operation with the immigrant Europeans and Asians, others characterized by bitter racial antagonism."

Two useful appendixes conclude the book. One gives a brief chronology of major dates in African history; the other is a short gazette listing the various countries with their populations, principal products, form of government, and type of franchise.

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Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan. Robert J. Braidwood and Bruce Howe. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill., 1960. 184 pp. $5.

This book purports to be the story of a long-term field project aimed at shedding light on how settled village-farming communities first came into being; but all kinds of evidence from many major prehistoric and some early historic sites in southwestern Asia are presented and discussed in considerable detail by Braidwood and Howe. Specialized dating techniques, climatological evidence, paleoethnobotany, and the archeology of animal domestication are dealt with separately by Frederick R. Matson, Herbert E. Wright, Jr., Hans Helbaeck, and Charles A. Reed, respectively. Reed happily emphasizes the grave dangers of attempting to