

in the political life of England in the past hundred and fifty years, Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Gladstone, Salisbury (at the beginning of this century), Lansbury and Cripps. There is also a rather sketchy chapter about the Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe which have been in office, if not always in power, since the end of the Second World War. This juxtaposition is a most salutary exercise, although one feels that of the British statesmen only Lansbury and Cripps were trying consciously to be Christian politicians.

The main point which emerges, especially in the two chapters devoted to the difficulties of applying Christian principles in home and foreign affairs, is the immense burden laid on the active layman. Churchmen and theologians may enunciate high-sounding principles, but the layman has the unenviable task of making the prudential judgments. One of the most moving quotations in this book is a letter from Lansbury to Cripps full of doubt and frustration, yet illumined by a humble faith. The pluralist society is not the easiest place to try and exercise the art of the possible.

JOHN FITZSIMONS

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT AND BRITISH POLITICS, by James B. Christoph; Allen and Unwin; 25s.

The Homicide Act of 1957, with its categories of capital and non-capital murder and its provision for diminished responsibility as a ground of defence, was the outcome of ten years of parliamentary and public controversy. Its compromises, and the way they were arrived at, reflect very well the processes of democratic debate in this country, and Professor Christoph's valuable book is as much a study of government at work as it is of the particular issue of the abolition of the death penalty for murder.

The two parliamentary battles - the first under the Attlee administration in 1948 and the second under Eden in 1956-7 - were very similar in pattern. A free vote in the House of Commons ensured a victory for abolition on both occasions; each time the measure was heavily defeated in the Lords. Under the Labour Government, the Criminal Justice Act was passed, omitting any mention of capital punishment: under the Tories, a compromise bill was devised, which won the allegiance of most of the earlier Conservative abolitionists, and the 1957 act became law. There were strange parallels. In 1948 Major Lloyd George was an abolitionist and the Home Secretary (Mr Chuter Ede) opposed any change in the law. In 1957 their votes were exactly reversed, for by this time Major Lloyd George was Home Secretary and Mr Chuter Ede was in opposition.

The history of the debates and the parliamentary manoeuvring of these years is accurately recalled by Professor Christoph, with all the paraphernalia of private members' motions, ten minute rules, pairing and lobbying. And he gives full weight to the campaign *pro* and *con* outside Westminster, with all the publicity aroused by such spectacular murder cases as those of Craig and Bentley, Evans

and Christie and Ruth Ellis - all of which cast grave doubts on the rightness of existing legislation and Home Office practice. The Gowers Report is analysed, and its importance to the whole question of reform is properly estimated.

In the end one is left with an uneasy impression that what should be an issue that stands outside the day-by-day devices of politics was in fact determined by them. The present law, with its manifest inconsistencies - of which the arbitrary list of capital murders is the most obvious - is a monument to political manoeuvre, and as such wholly unacceptable in a matter of such moral gravity. It can hardly survive, for opinion can hardly go on supporting so uncertain, not to say wayward, an instrument of justice. The earlier campaigns and debates will not have been in vain, for not a single contention of the abolitionist case has been seriously questioned. And Professor Christoph's book is a useful document in a case that has still to be decided.

ILLTUD EVANS, O. P.

THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, by Leonard Beaton and John Maddox; Chatto and Windus; 18s.

This is the kind of book that begins to get out of date as soon as published, but serves a useful purpose for politicians, journalists and such like. Chiefly responsible for this one were Mr Alastair Buchan of the Institute of Strategic Studies, and the Rockefeller Foundation who made a grant towards it: the actual authors who did the research and international travel and wrote such a clear and readable book were two correspondents on the staff of the *Guardian*.

It is entirely a factual book, if we include fact-based estimates of possibilities. No guessing, no wishful thinking, no moral judgments. After a chapter on what it takes, in technology, finance, and man-power, to produce nuclear weapons, and another chapter on how far nuclear-sharing is likely between nations, the authors describe the situation in nine leading countries other than Russia and U.S.A., the most thought-provoking chapters being on China and Israel. After which there is a final summing up about future hopes and possibilities.

Apparently any industrialized nation can become a nuclear power, unassisted, in about seven years, but spreading seems likelier to come about through nuclear powers selling or giving bombs to their allies. No Government has ever given its people a choice about becoming a nuclear power; our own country's decision to have an independent 'deterrent' was made by the well-meaning Mr Attlee (urged on by Mr Churchill of course) about 1950; and moralists should note that the British deterrent's target has always been the Soviet cities (p. 75). The dangers involved in more and more nations getting nuclear weapons are generally recognized; seemingly only the French Government, with that extreme lack of practical psychology which is so French a characteristic, professes to think that the spreading makes war *less* probable.