ORBIT OF CHINA,
by Harrison Salisbury.
Secker and Warburg. 222pp.
$3.85.

THIS BOOK, by a trained and perceptive, though not deep observer makes fascinating reading.

Harrison Salisbury, life-long journalist and now Assistant Managing Editor of the New York Times, last year undertook with his wife, Charlotte, a 30,000-mile journey, visiting most countries close to, or as the title has it, in the "orbit of" China.

Later in the year he visited North Vietnam, from which his despatches deservedly achieved world headlines, especially his rejection of US claims of "no civilian casualties", and his interview with Pham Van Dong, confirming that cessation of US bombing could lead to negotiations.

Before dealing with his conclusions we wing our way with Salisbury to Cambodia, where he reveals Central Intelligence Agency—South Vietnamese training of the so-called "Cambodian Freedom Movement" used for forays into Cambodia along the frontier.

On to Thailand and the big American build-up—15,000 to 35,000 troops in the first nine months of 1966, six great air bases including Sattahip with 11,500 foot runways, and (when completed) the biggest naval base in the Far East.

In Laos, Salisbury claims, opium is the key, and is in the hands of the Kuomintang troops who had retreated from Yunnan in 1949. These KMT troops were later replenished with CIA assistance. Perhaps generously, he holds that "although there was evidence of CIA links to all of the participants in the (opium) trade I did not believe the CIA was a direct partner. However it was an indirect beneficiary. Its interest was its intelligence and possibly clandestine operations in China."

From Burma he quotes an Air Force Commander who felt that the Americans had already lost in Vietnam "because they did not understand that the white man could no longer fight in Asia and win." And Premier Ne Win, who looks with horror on what US 'aid' is doing in SE Asia—"This kind of aid does not help. It cripples, it paralyses . . ." he says.

In Japan, many influential people Salisbury records, "still thought in terms of the Japanese dream of an 'East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'" (which was to include Australia—E.A.). On the basis of Japan's industrial advance "some are beginning to add up what this means in terms of world power", and to hanker after nuclear weapons—a question which was "on the agenda before China exploded her first nuclear device."

These are matters bearing very much on Australia's future and foreign policy, which have been ignored for too long in this country, including by the left.

Salisbury's observations on the Soviet Far East and Mongolia are also well worth reading, but let us now push on to the conclusions.

What prompts Salisbury's journeying is the consuming fear, shared no doubt by other high-ups on his paper and by a significant section of the US ruling class, that America is on a collision course with China, a course which they feel could only result ultimately in a world nuclear war and universal devastation, but above all virtual destruction of the United States itself.
It is from this viewpoint that Salisbury advances his solution:
Standstill, de-escalation and some approach to a settlement in Vietnam.

By this and subsequent steps, for the US to show its desire, not for victory in Vietnam but for a solution which would place the fate and future of SE Asia in Asian hands.

To help (drag, if necessary) China into the community of nations, instead of isolating her.

To assist technically and in all ways to solve the food and population problem in China.

One could perhaps end a review at this point, and on a very positive note, which the book deserves. But the assumptions, reasoning and ideology behind the author's conclusions, mainly serving the cause of peace though these conclusions do, demand some critical scrutiny.

Salisbury's basic view is outlined on page 193: "When I looked at the dynamics of China—the chart of her rising population, the ineffectual measures being taken to reduce the birth-rate; the relatively ineffective means being taken to increase food production—it seemed to me that one could project on a chart the year when China's rulers would be forced into aggressive action across their frontiers in search of food for the rice-bowls of their people. And that date, I felt certain, must come up within the next decade — possibly sooner if there was a succession of bad crop years."

One can recognise the existence of a population-growth problem, and that disagreement over economic policy is a basic factor in the 'cultural revolution', as this reviewer does, without sharing Salisbury's simplistic view that population pressure is the basic determinant in Chinese policy, and of much of world politics, and will soon result in China acting aggressively.

(A similar basic thesis on population, incidentally, seemed to lie behind the recent "Our World" TV program).

My quarrel is not with stress on the existence of the problem, but failure to recognise that it is the US which is acting aggressively, not China, and failure to even pose, let alone face up to, basic questions bearing on population growth.

In all under-developed countries there is great ferment, having as its aim the changing of social structures in ways which would bring industrialisation and end the stagnation of the village, the cultural and other forms of backwardness which bear down on the country as a whole.

Apart from directly assisting production of food — and the technical means to increase food supply faster than population for the next half century at least are already known — such social changes would begin to create conditions which have resulted in a fall in the birthrate in all technically advanced countries.

The reduction in the birthrate in such countries is probably due to a complex of reasons, but in any case clearly indicates that with social changes bringing rising standards of living and culture, education in birth control would succeed in a way impossible in under-developed countries.

Yet such social changes are precisely what American power aims to prevent in Vietnam, Latin America and other areas. Changes such as cannot be achieved without social revolution in India, where the peasant has little incentive to increase production, even had he the means.
since most of it would be taken in payment for generations-old debts.

Further, the American world-wide exploitation of under-developed countries which the Vietnam war is seen as a key in maintaining, also acts powerfully against those social changes which would bring lower birthrates in their wake.

In Chile it is estimated that the copper deposits are liable to be exhausted by the end of the century. Since the main profits go out, to the US, how will Chile be able to industrialise? Or the oil producing, the tin producing, the banana, the coffee or cocoa producing countries?

These facts contain some of the reasons why those favoring social revolution are less frightened by the ‘population explosion’ though they recognise the problem, than those who cannot see past support for the capitalist system and its world-wide chain of interests.

Perhaps that is why Salisbury is not over-sanguine of being able to avoid the ‘war of races’ on the verge of which he sees the world standing. But we can all support the thought with which he concludes his book:

"The first steps would be the most difficult. Many Americans would think them politically impossible. Yet the choice was clear. America must act or face possible obliteration. Better the political courage to take tough decisions ... than the hesitation or hypocrisy which would doom us all to disaster."

E.A.

THE SUN KING,
by Nancy Mitford.
Hamish Hamilton. $7.35.

LOUIS XIV has become almost a fashionable subject for historians. It is not long since we had W. H. Lewis' fine studies of The Splendid Century; and now Nancy Mitford has worked back from the mid-18th century which she loves so dearly to the late 17th again.

Engels used to complain of the self-styled marxists who fling the phrase "historical materialism" around as a sort of charm to ward off the necessity of actual historical research. Mitford is an excellent antidote to these people. She has genuinely soaked herself in the period, and has all its detail at her pen's end. Not that she claims to have written a history of the period; she takes aim only at its central figure, the King himself, but she sees him in depth and in his context. She uses the contemporary eyes of the artists who depicted Louis XIV, the diarists of the court who whispered about him, the ambassadors who weighed him up, the statesmen and priests who counselled him, and some at least of the women who slept with him.

What is more, she gives pictures of all these people themselves, as she does of the palaces Louis lived in, the furniture of his rooms, the spurs he rode with and the surgeon's kit that he was bled with. Pictures in paint by Rigaud, Poussin, Largillière, Bosse and anonymous portraitists; pictures in words by Saint-Simon, Dangeau, Sévigné and nameless diarists and scandalmongers. Every page of the book is pictorial, vivid, glowing, detailed, flavored with affection and malice.

Yet there is not too much detail or too much affection. There are countless little stabbing touches that bring characters and manners into sudden life. One understands the Duc de Nevers a little better on being told that he was once imprisoned for baptizing a pig. One discovers (at last!) why Chamillart was made a Privy Councillor: "he was almost the only courtier who could give the King a decent game of billiards". Long sermons on megalomania would have been far less illuminating than such details are.
What the details add up to is a lively and highly credible view of an astonishing event: the creation, and then the destruction, of a great, civilised nation-state. Louis was, in a way, a compound of Cromwell and the two Charles's. First, assembling a team of brilliant commoners, he destroyed the power of his rowdy nobles, and set up the state which he rightly saw as himself. Then, over-adulated, feared, lonely, he withdrew himself; and his great creation went to smash. It is by sheer fluke that there was not civil war when he died.

In spite of plentiful recent examples, Louis XIV remains the classic instance of what an individual can achieve while he swims with the tide of history; and of what damage a cult of that individual can do when the tide turns.

Nancy Mitford writes with ease, dash and elegance. She carries her vast load of information gracefully. The book which she has written is an admirable one for the reader who already knows even a little about the period. For the beginner, there are a few traps. Mitford overrates the accuracy of Saint-Simon. She even believes him when he imputes cowardice to the Due du Maine in the campaign of 1695. I do hope that she will have had access, before another edition of this book is printed, to the memoirs of Major-General de Saint-Hilaire—an eyewitness of the facts—who blows this particular bit of ducal slander into thin air.

John Manifold

THE LONG VOYAGE,
by Jorge Semprun. Formentor Prize Winner.
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 236 pp. $2.25.

Jorge Semprun has written a remarkable novel. In prose as spare and sinewy as an outback stock-rider, it is an intensely personal document that makes one want to know more, much more about the author.

The actual facts I have are very few. Semprun is a Spaniard, a "Spanish Red" of the 1930's who crossed the frontier into France in 1936 and later joined up with a French Resistance group. Sent to Auschwitz concentration camp, he survived to write this book nearly twenty years later when the long voyage from Compiègne to Auschwitz, the long voyage from life to almost certain death, the long voyage for 160 men jammed into one cattle truck for days and nights on end, could be relived and written about. He still lives in Paris. I believe another novel of his is being filmed.

However, through his hero Manuel I do in fact feel that I know Jorge Semprun quite well. They share a common background and many experiences. The character that emerges is outstanding and, for me, utterly admirable.

Manuel is a political man, one who has fought against Franco and who sees his political activity in terms of freedom. He has never been more free than when he was arrested. What "left" of the thirties and forties will not warm to this passage: "... we become identified with one another to the extent that we partake of this freedom. And it is to the extent that we partake of this freedom that we get ourselves arrested ... I'm not implying that we all partook equally of that freedom common to us. Some people ... partake accidentally of this freedom which is common to us. Perhaps they freely chose the resistance, the clandestine life, but since then they have been living on the initial impulse of that free act ... they are not living their freedom, they are ensconced in it."? And how many will feel a shamefaced identification with those who are so ensconced? All too few of us have remained free in Manuel's terms.
Manuel is a strong, young, vigorous man, a man who loves wine, food and the winter strength and beauty of the countryside. He loves ideas expressed in books, in music and pictures, in argument and discussion.

Manuel thinks sweetly and tenderly of women, although there is not a real love scene in the book, and as sweetly and tenderly of his comrades in the Resistance, with their incredible bravery and heart-warming foolhardiness.

Manuel hates only one thing — fascism. He hates it as many of us did and as a smaller number of us still do, because of the way it degrades, blunts and destroys even those who do not know what is happening to them. I should like everyone who ever felt this hatred and all those who are too young to have known fascism in its most brutal manifestation to read this book and take this long voyage with Manuel and Jorge Semprun.

They would learn or re-learn from it something of the passion and dedication felt by millions during the purest and most unselfish period of their lives.

I have just read this book. It was published in 1963, almost twenty years after the author’s Long Voyage, but I feel, with the publishers, that it will continue to be read long after everyone who shared Semprun’s experience is long dead.

LORRAINE SALMON.

AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW

Manuel is a strong, young, vigorous man, a man who loves wine, food and the winter strength and beauty of the countryside. He loves ideas expressed in books, in music and pictures, in argument and discussion.

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Australian left review Aug.-Sept., 1967

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LORRAINE SALMON.


The co-editors of this book have earned the blessings of those interested in Australian labor relations. For bringing together the twenty-five readings contained in it, plus four extensive lists of references, will forever save such a person the great amount of time required to make such an essential collection by oneself.

Although the book is primarily designed for the use of students in labor relations courses at universities, the hope is expressed that it will also be of interest to a wider public such as advocates, union officials, industrial officers and public servants.

This hope should be fulfilled, as the book is good value for both bulk and for content. $3.50 for 527 pages is good value for paper, while the contents are good value as they are well selected to cover a wide spectrum of aspects of labor relations. The book would therefore be a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone interested in the subject, not only for study but also for reference.

The title is perhaps a bit misleading, in so far as most of the contents are designed to develop a better understanding of the arbitration system, although this admittedly is a major factor in labor relations in Australia.

In passing, I notice that the book was printed in Hong Kong, and possibly most of those connected with its production would be Chinese. If any of them read it while it was in production, there must have been some puzzlement over the strange ways of those inscrutable Australians!

It is not possible in a brief review such as this to deal specifically with a number of readings ranging over such a wide field, particularly when many of them can open up extensive debate on the aspect they deal with. So only two general comments are made.

The first comment is that the balance of Australian Labor Readings is interesting in the light of
current events. Parts 1, 2 and 3 on Industrial Conflict, Trade Unions, and Employer Associations respectively take up in all about 260 pages, while Part 4 on Industrial Regulation and Collective Bargaining takes up about 225 pages.

This is probably a rough measure of the relative importance of the four matters in the field of industrial relations. But Part 4 is given an added interest now because of the opening era of wage fixation by the introduction of the total wage in 1967, for this new development cannot but intensify the debate within the trade union movement as to which of the two paths the trade union movement should follow.

The second comment is that a striking feature of the book is the almost complete absence of any original readings from the trade union movement. The book correctly points out that they are an integral part of the arbitration system, which could not in fact operate without their co-operation. But of the 16 authors of the readings, 13 are academics, 2 officers of the Commonwealth Commission and one a public servant when he wrote his reading.

The only reading from the trade union movement is a reprint of the resolution passed at the 1965 ACTU Congress on the Penal Provisions. There are also no items in the extensive reference lists indicating trade union material.

This situation is not the fault of the co-authors, but of the trade union movement. It raises the disturbing question in the mind of any thoughtful trade unionist as to whether this apparent paucity of creative thinking by the movement really meets the needs of the present times.

That perhaps this is one explanation for the way in which the employers are making rings round the trade unions. That perhaps the employers’ success is due to their ability to engage in creative thinking as to their policies and, if necessary, to abandon time honored concepts that have become outmoded for them.

That the Arbitration Commission, too, has been doing some hard thinking on its part, as demonstrated by its 1967 decision. That this hard thinking in other quarters is not apparently being matched by equivalent hard thinking by the trade unions as to their policies. And will the 1967 ACTU Congress show that some hard thinking has taken place, or will it adopt the same pedestrian attitude of previous Congresses and so leave the trade union movement that much further behind?

J. Hutson.

(Mr. Hutson is a Research Officer of the Combined Research Centre of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Boilermakers’ and Blacksmiths’ Society. — Ed.)

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEARNING,
by R. Borger and A.E.M. Seaborne.
Pelican. 249 pp. 80c.

THE SENSES,
by O. Lowerstein.
Pelican. 216 pp. 80c.

DESPITE THE ATTEMPTS of some psychologists to reduce the whole of learning to a single principle (e.g. reinforcement, conditioning) the processes by which people acquire their habits, skills, knowledge and abnormalities remain very varied. Most of these processes, even the simple ones, are not properly understood scientifically even though many good rules of thumb exist to guide the learner or teacher. Borger and Seaborne outline both the scientific-theoretical
problems and the practical consequences in a number of areas of behavior. The treatment is at a non-technical level and, despite the fact that contentious issues have been glossed over, the authors have written a good introduction to the subject. Teachers, high school students intending to study psychology, as well as the layman, will find it useful.

Lowenstein's book on the structure and functioning of the nervous system is, in the reviewer's opinion, a book well worth study by marxists. The central issue which Lowenstein deals with is the mechanisms underlying our knowledge of the external world. Each of the sensory systems (vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch, etc.) is dealt with in much the same way. First the gross structure of the organ is outlined and then details of its functioning are presented. Stress is laid upon the way in which the external stimulus object gives rise to a particular pattern of nervous system response. The final chapters deal with the transmission (amplification and processing) of these responses in the different parts of the nervous system on the way to the brain. The last chapter discusses some of the philosophical issues involved. The reader should not be put off by Lowenstein's agnosticism. The fundamental test that our knowledge is of the external world and is correct comes from practice rather than from the forcefulness of arguments in panel discussion.

P.D.


DR. MILLAR is concerned in this book with the interactions of the British Commonwealth and the United Nations. He takes several major international disputes of the past twenty years (though Vietnam is a noticeable exception) and examines the reactions of Commonwealth countries towards them, both within the Commonwealth sphere (as for example at Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences) and at the UN itself. He deals with the Indian-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir, the Suez crisis, the Korean war, decolonisation within the Commonwealth and racial disputes in South Africa.

His main thesis, though only guardedly developed, is that the twenty-one nations comprising the Commonwealth have, up till now, been better able to understand each other's position and attitudes at the UN by virtue of their being partners in the Commonwealth. He speaks of "an attitude, an idea about international society", and views the Commonwealth's role as primarily that of enabling a freer exchange of ideas between its members than would otherwise be the case.

Beyond this, however, he seems unwilling to go, pointing out in his final chapter that those who argue that the Commonwealth is merely a 'concert of convenience' have neglected the emotional overtones of the Commonwealth notion of which we in Australia are only too well aware.

Instead, one of the main issues regarding the Commonwealth that Dr. Millar could well have devoted more space to is this question of its nature. What exactly is it that holds the Commonwealth together despite all the shocks it has received, both at the UN and elsewhere, over recent years? It could well be that the answer lies more in the sphere of mass public opinion than in the diplomatic give-and-take of the UN or the Prime Ministers' Conferences.

In this sense too the book seems already dated (and perhaps any treatment of Vietnam would have dated it even more), talking about an entity which is changing so rapidly that it
seems to defy any effort to crystallise it or to draw current generalisations about its role. For example, Dr. Millar points out that the UN initially recognised the bloc nature of the Commonwealth by always allowing a Commonwealth country to sit as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. But this practice ceased in 1964 and the implication of this, for us in 1967, is an aspect of UN-Commonwealth relations that Dr. Millar doesn't discuss.

But the main point here seems to lie more in the inherent difficulties of the ever-developing topic than in any oversight on the author's part. His book, especially with its Appendix of the UN voting record of the various Commonwealth countries, is a valuable contribution to an almost unexplored area of international relations.

L.N.C

THE STRANGE CASE OF JFK ASSASSINATION FIGURES, by David Wesh and William Turner.
A Eureka Youth League Publication, 9 pp, 25c.

THE FATE of key personnel surrounding the Kennedy assassination comes under discussion in a new booklet just released onto the Australian market.

Bearing a graphic photo of the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy on the front page, it introduces the topic of the report and, with the aid of one paragraph, leaves the reader in no two minds as to what he can expect to experience.

"An unexplained aftermath of the Kennedy assassination is that at least ten persons, each with some special knowledge of the tragedy, have died violent, peculiar or mysterious deaths," it says.

And the contents of the booklet do justice to the front page promise. The booklet reprints an article that originally appeared in the February, 1967, issue of Cosmopolitan.

The January and March issues of the American magazine were freely available on Australian news-stands. The February issue was strangely absent.

With the knowledge that they have potential dynamite in their hands, the authors put forward definite evidence for their case, bringing into the spotlight blatant discrepancies within the Warren Commission report.

The Warren Commission, the authors claim, "was set up by Lyndon Johnson, was responsible to Johnson and respected a lawyer-client relationship with Johnson. It was truly the 'President's Commission'."

The case is built around the strange and violent deaths of key figures, and the fear engendered in others who could possibly have valuable evidence on the assassination.

The article puts forward this evidence and questions why the Warren Commission neglected to call some of the valuable witnesses.

Truly, for those who are not satisfied with the whitewash given the tragic occurrence by the big-business news sheets, this book is a must.

N.S.